Everything Bad

- A Musing on How Really Everything About the 2nd Trump Administration is Bad, Corrupt, Anti-People, Anti-Life and Autocratic, on How this Compares to Dictatorships Across the Globe, and on the Application of the Word Evil

by D.C. Ceva

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License

https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/

Preface
1. Madness to the Method
2. The Rationale of Cruelty
3. The Grift
4. The Bedroom and the Toys
5. The Stories We Tell Ourselves
6. The Others (U.S. Edition)
7. The Other Others (Join the Club)
8. The Stupid - an often neglected aspect of the autocrat
9. It's the Voters, Stupid
10. Evil
Epilogue - Everything Good

Preface

From time to time you hear them throwing it in. Like a nanny, reminding the child, ‘you know, this is just play-acting, don’t you?’ Or an on-the-edge therapist guiding a patient through a session with psychedelics. ‘Remember, this isn’t real.’ Of course it *is* real. And to a degree it’s understandable if some of us, just as when the acting goes a little out of hand or if you’re on a very bad trip, might now and then need the reminder.
‘This isn’t normal.’
Which is the sentence you could hear the anchors, pundits and commentators utter over the past few months, at least on the saner networks, infrequently but reliably, and you will continue to hear it.[1]
This isn’t normal. A simple sentence we might as well address aliens with, should a bunch of extraterrestrials pick this moment of all to come and visit (*please don’t, not now*), ‘we assure you, this isn’t at all representative of us, this isn’t normal.’ Question, of course, is whether that is true.
In reality the statement is meant to try and prevent people from slipping into acclimatization coma. No, you should *not* accept this. No, you should not just try and live with it. Don’t think of it as business as usual but with a twist of lemon. Don’t imagine things may not have been quite as bad, but similar before. And all you young folks out there who have grown up within this context, learn some history and see where it had been, and know that it isn’t supposed to be like that. Get a feel for this. This should feel very, very wrong to you. Something has gone terribly wrong. And yes, it’s real.

Another thing you may hear from the same anchors, pundits and commentators occasionally is an expression of horrified astonishment over how quickly the Trump administration, if you can still call it an administration (but for now I’ll continue to use the word), has already gotten into delivering the harm. Here I don’t quite agree. I’m an old pessimist, and if anything I’m surprised how long it is taking them to get this foul smelling flower to unfold its petals, and I’m expecting still worse to come. And this may or may not have more to do with them being incompetent even at realising their agenda rather than the checks and balances in the U.S.’ governing system that have shown themselves to fall apart by the seams one by one. Had you pointed at April, March, even February on Inauguration Day, I’d have predicted us to be in an even more dire predicament.
Patience.

All in all, what strikes me, if not at all in surprise, but as something that should be noted and added to every time we restate that what we’re witnessing isn’t normal, is just how *bad* every decision, every executive order, every point on this broad agenda, on this rightwing wish list, how plain bad every act as committed or attempted on behalf of this administration is. How anti-life. How anti-liberty (though, of course, accompanied with the loudest yells of the word ‘freedom’). How anti-joy. How anti-decency. How anti-rights. How anti-knowledge. How anti-science. How anti-progress. How anti-good. Just how frankly evil.
There is a reason for this word, evil. It’s a solid, useful word. It describes something for which there’s none other. Just as there is a reason for the word stupid, and although for the latter there are plentiful of variations, it’s always advisable to take and use both of them conscientiously.

It is important to remember that it’s not just Trump, especially not in the long run. The man is 78, one day he’ll be dead. And we’re not only dealing with this entourage of sycophants and the cowards enabling him and them. I never sympathized with the Republican Party (depending on the respective administration, I wasn’t always in agreement or energized by the Democrats either), but even with that in mind I’m having difficulties to keep referring to what is currently in power in the United States as the Republican Party, or even the GOP. Not only is it so not grand, it’s not the same party any longer. If that seems too pedantic to anyone, I may invoke a possible near future, because

1 A suitable example is this MSNBC clip from about half a year ago, in which Jonathan Capehart commentates on the small selection of examples in a fitting and exclusive way with that very sentence: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F-xzfNAsjSw

I wouldn't be surprised either should this new party elect to choose a new name themselves at one point. The Freedom Party? The Great American Party? The America First Party? Or perhaps the First America Party (in case you now think all of these lack imagination, it'd be them picking the name, and they tend not to have too much of the good stuff).
But this new party, the elements that have the say now, they've been setting themselves up for good, and they've been working on it for some time now. This is a long game. What had for long involved a sturdy amount of cheating, e.g. by means of gerrymandering and voting restrictions, has evolved into a solid plan to stay in power by, and this lurks in the nature of the desire, undemocratic means. No more need to cheat. Just don't allow the other party back in the game. I don't think anyone with half a sober mind can deny it at this point, the sobering-bit bears the name January 6th.[2] And it very much seems that the perpetrators have invested more effort in learning from it than the other side for this time around.

But right now, it is very much Trump. It is also Trump where he allows his appointed minions to go free range. From time to time it seems a rationale is being employed. The reluctance on behalf of this administration to ensure a swift and safe return of Kilmar Ábrego García, who has been deported to El Salvador and into a high-max prison center from where it is reportedly very hard to be released (as in *ever*), and where the conditions are making a mockery of the term human rights, without due process and despite everyone agreeing that the man had been deported due to a mistake, will and must be absolutely unacceptable to anyone with only a shred of integrity.[3] Cruelty and indifference is certainly part of this reluctance, but so may also be an aversion to precedent. What goes for Mr. García, namely that he had not been granted due process, also goes for just about all of the deported.[4] If we're 'only' talking a few more innocents – 'if we're doing this for one innocent man, where will that leave us?'

It can be a challenge to sort the calculated from the impulsive, the front from what's been done in the shadows, to tell what is meant to side-track and distract from what is well planned and more or less quietly executed, because both apply with this administration. They continue with this strategy because it hasn't been working too badly for them so far.
What we must not do is assuming something perfectly rational and well thought out behind every single of Mr. Trump's crazy seeming escapades. Sometimes what looks like a duck and talks like a duck… There is a tendency for that, too. Maybe he's doing this in order to… (something similar has earned Putin a reputation for being somewhat of a sly fox; I'd urge everyone to resist the idea, slyness isn't what's required for anything Putin has done in his life). It's understandable when the sycophants do it, as very recently when Trump pulled back from the bulk of tariffs he was about to impose on, that's right, the whole world, of humans and penguins: 'that was his plan all along.'[5]
With the sane people it's another variation on the theme of trying to normalize. We lean toward this. To finding a rational explanation. And sometimes there is. Again, it can be hard. But the exercise of

---

2 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/January_6_United_States_Capitol_attack

3 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deportation_of_Kilmar_Abrego_Garcia

4 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deportation_in_the_second_presidency_of_Donald_Trump
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/March_2025_American_deportations_of_Venezuelans

5 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tariffs_in_the_second_Trump_administration
https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/apr/03/donald-trump-tariffs-antarctica-uninhabited-heard-mcdonald-islands
The Maddow-take:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lStWAhGfxn0
Director of the National Economic Council of the United States Kevin Hassett, enthusiastically revealing Trump's 'master-move' on Fox News:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wNvAdyTSowg

distinguishing must be undertaken with diligence. Because it might often be worse when there's not an explanation pointing to a rational mind.

'It's such a fine line between stupid and clever,' as David St. Hubbins famously quipped.[6]
Let's try that again. It's a very distinct demarcation line, but people in general don't often pay much attention where they're going. The stupid and the ridiculous certainly don't pose much of a hurdle on the path to power, and that line, still not too fine, can actually be drawn between the despots of this world and them fulfilling their ambitions, as we shall see. Once again one of my favourite movie lines comes to mind, uttered by Hal Halbrook's raspy voice as Deep Throat in 'All The President's Men': 'Forget the myth the media has created around the White House, the truth is, those guys aren't very bright.'[7]
Not being very bright clearly doesn't prevent success, there are countless of examples in- and outside of politics for that, just as there are many examples for being bright as not being a guarantee for success. The recipe is quite another one.

Nor is it one used to cook in the U.S. alone. More than once I heard someone saying that what we're currently seeing as a new pandemic in its own right is the far right's last rearing. It's meant to reassure that at the end everything will turn out fine. But we're not living in a Disney movie. My reply is to ask, 'maybe. But what if they win? That's right. Then it'll also have been their last rearing.'

'This isn't normal.'
That depends. If you mean it as replacing the word 'usual' I'm afraid we're on track for it to becoming the norm. If, however, you dare to question sanity, then yes, I concur. It isn't. Certainly not healthy. And how do we define insanity, more broadly speaking, if not by an unhealthy mind? There is good cause for having a closer look at this word, as well as related ones, it's useful to do in any context where we use words like these interchangeably, so there'll be a whole section dedicated to it. And it'll go a way to explain why the effort of this and other administrations are indeed this bad. Why they appear outright evil.

6 This Is Spinal Tap, 1984, written by Christopher Guest, Michael McKean, Harry Shearer & Rob Reiner, directed by Rob Reiner
7 All the President's Men, 1976, written by William Goldman, based on the book of the same title by Carl Bernstein & Bob Woodward, directed by Alan J. Pakula

1. Madness to the Method

It's hard to write about this and avoid listing (as well as constantly updating) the blusters and the blunders, the instances of incompetence and outrage, the attacks on everything that holds a society together. I will try and restrict it to where examples are needed, as you can and will read about them on a daily basis, but I can't promise to avoid it completely.
One particular type of apparent fixation on behalf of Mr. Trump, picked up quickly by his obedient entourage of pundits and cabinet members, serves well to highlight an important question, and the two most obvious examples being here Canada and Greenland: how did *that* start?[8] I'm leaving out Panama, since it would appear that this has been a real grievance on Trump's part for a while.[9]

When asking the question I'm not so much interested in an exact date and the context of a particular conversation. That the idea of the United States either buying or, should the respective and affected governments and citizens not be interested in selling, as is clearly the case here, annexing Canada and/or Greenland seems so insane because of our image of the most powerful nation on the planet for so very long. Meddling in other countries' affairs, yes. Installing the one or other government here and there, sure. Starting a war that may or may not be better or badly justified, that we can wrap our heads around. But threatening to annex a region or whole country, and with the justification basically being 'because I want it', not to mention that we're talking historical allies here? That's something we're only used from pariah states. It's shocking that Putin is an usurper and aggressor who goes this far, we're feeling helpless, but it isn't surprising.[10] But the United States?
If an emotion can become oxymoronic then this could be the case here where the United States is no longer its people but someone who's gained the most powerful position in the world with the expressed purpose of making it even more powerful, and way more powerful. And it didn't take us much time since the first utterance of this crazy idea to considering that the man might indeed be serious. Among the many terrifying details I imagine when trying to picture Trump's America posting troops all around Greenland and ships into its waters to deter the Danish fleet, or those troops standing face to face, so to speak, before their Canadian counterparts, there's always the individual soldier. The idealised soldier, I should say, the soldier who has become a soldier for the right reasons, and is working to maintain this integrity. How conflicted that soldier would be. A

---

8 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_expansionism_under_Donald_Trump#

9 A CNN piece by Phil Mattingly on Trump's obsession with Panama:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-7SnBk1nPzs

10 While Russia's foreign military involvements are many and go back way beyond Putin's rise, Putin has continually made steps to not so much keep former regions within Russia's influence, but to get them back, with force, if he deems it necessary. The war in Georgia should be interpreted in this manner, and Russia's president then having been Dmitri Medvedev should not deflect from who really had been in power.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russo-Georgian_War
Russia's war against Ukraine, the first bout beginning after the Euromaidan Protests and Yanukovych's escape to Moscow in 2014 in eastern Donbas and ending with the annexation of Crimea, and which has been picked up by Putin as a full-scale invasion and war in February 2022 that is still ongoing, signifies the most blatant example of Putin's expansionism.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russo-Ukrainian_War
Besides these Putin's Russia has engaged in Syria to help its dictator Bashar al-Assad to remain in power, and involved itself in the civil war in the Central African Republic, to name only these.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_intervention_in_the_Syrian_civil_war
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Central_African_Republic_Civil_War
Although only in its later phase, Putin was also influential in the decade-long 2nd Chechen War.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_Chechen_War

person knowing right from wrong, but who's also recipient in the chain of command, atop which sits the Commander in Chief. The way out for this soldier, in the naïve screenplay of my fantasy, is that a command that is illegal, unconstitutional, not only doesn't have to be obeyed, it must be refused, and failure to do so will make the obeying individual responsible.[11] Not that I'd go as far as imagining that the U.S. Constitution is seen as much of an obstacle in Mr. Trump decision process.

But how does the idea of going this far with Greenland even form? As opposed to getting what one wants by means of continuing an alliance, which in the case of Greenland would not only be an alliance with Denmark and the big island, but also several other nations. How does such an idea form in case of the giant northern neighbour Canada? Which is not merely an administrative part of another country, but a whole and rather big sovereign nation.
There are two hypotheses here, and by all means, they don't necessarily cancel each other out. Number one is the impression, and I'm not the only one who got it. Trump makes what he thinks constitutes a joke. Calling what the type who enrols in dictator training camp exhibits in this respect rotten humour would be subscribing to the idea that there's anything funny about it. So he makes an unfunny, rotten joke, and it's already meant to rile people up. He didn't actually mean to annex Canada. But, as was intended, people do get riled up. A lot. Which is something Trump enjoys. You see that tendency in the people around you, you start warning the neighbours about that person. More about that later.
So people get upset, their anger dominates the news alongside his suggestion, so he doubles down. Repeats it. 'Those lefties, those liberals and progressives. Always getting so agitated. Look at them jittering. Especially the folks up north.' He likes it. So he repeats it over and over. 'Come to think about it…' So now people beginning to wonder. Is he actually serious? Wonder, and worry. Couldn't get any better. Now they're afraid.
It's the Dennis Rader dog catcher phase incentive.[12] Enjoying to watch people in distress?
But Trump isn't exactly someone who's split the atom. Nor is he particularly sensitive. And he detached real good. You repeat something often enough, you think you're the smartest person around, you're having delusions of grandeur, sooner enough it'll seem like a good idea to you, and no you *are* being serious.

Could be. Or.
You've been serious all along. And the reason why you're dropping it as a joke is to test the waters. See what happens. Will your base stick behind you? Will the ass-kissers in the party? Will the running board surfers who only wait for their time? The media that likes you? And if you stick it out for a little longer, will anyone try to impeach you? Be serious, who would even be able. Let's see how this will play out with those who're on your team. You can always say you were joking. But you probably won't have to.

I don't want to attribute too much planning capability to Trump. As so often we probably get closest to the truth with a blend of the two. Something he'd for a time wished he could do, once in office. Something he's liked as an idea for a while. But when dropped primarily meant to rile. To intimidate. To bully with. After all, there are other incentives complimenting the method. And the two, the wish and the effect, eventually connected. Not to forget, he admires Putin, a man who'd just done it. *That's* his role model, not the Constitution of the United States of America.
The point here is that there's a reason for everything, and a mechanism behind everything, even where something seems illogical and bizarre. If the mechanism involves a flawed machinery, then

11 The U.S. Department of Defense's 'Military Judges' Benchbook, 2017' states *'Obedience to an unlawful order does not necessarily result in criminal responsibility of the person obeying the order. The acts of the accused if done in obedience to an unlawful order are excused and carry no criminal responsibility unless the accused knew that the order was unlawful or unless the order was one which a person of ordinary common sense, under the circumstances, would know to be unlawful.'*

12 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dennis_Rader#Life_and_background

the result will be, to varying degrees, depending on how flawed the machinery is, grotesque. This grotesque outcome will still correspond with the machinery, with the exact nature of the flaw. And this applies to both of the above possibilities, and just as intensively to a blend of them, with the decisive difference that the machinery is a brain, and the mechanism is already flawed by an inflated and disturbed self-perception. What do you expect?

Indeed, what did anyone expect? Personally, I thought we'd already be much deeper in the mud. I fully counted with the possibility that Trump's idea of 'solving' the war in Ukraine 'on day one' would consist of immediately withdrawing all support and granting Putin all his wishes, serving him that country on a silver platter, without even going through the motions of creating an excuse first – which could be seen as the real intent during Zelenskyy's White House visit.[13] I fully counted with the possibility of Russian troops stationed on Poland's, Slovakia's, Romania's and Moldova's borders by now, not to mention the Baltic states.
I fully counted with the possibility of Trump withdrawing from NATO right after taking office.[14] I fully counted with a lot of fall-out coming with such decisions, including a signal taken by China in regards to Taiwan.[15] And more fall-out, growing, perhaps all too rapidly.
None of which is off the table of possibilities.

As for the national cluster-F that's been unfolding, the U.S.-internal manifestations, and that has indeed been unfolding from day one, none of it was or is surprising. It's more about what when and how exactly. A few details were not as anyone may have foreseen it so far, e.g. the establishment of DOGE under Elon Musk, though a variation of this was predictable.[16] It's basically all an advent calendar from the Upside Down.[17] Every morning you open a new door on your chosen news outlet and see what shape the piece of what you know isn't chocolate will be. Not a huge fan of Christmas to begin with, the Styx version really sucks.
There was a period, extending from election day until one or two days after Inauguration, during which you could note denial among the anchors and commentators of the more sensible American media outlets.
Let's get something out of the way here, shall we. Outlets such as MSNBC are often viewed as rather 'leftist' ones, foremost by their unambiguously right-leaning colleagues at FOX and other organisations lusting for the role of state-TV. The same description is even employed for the Democratic Party. Remember, Obama the Socialist? Just today I listened to an episode of The Guardian's Today in Focus podcast in which host Michael Safi interviewed author Ta-Nehisi Coates, and Mr. Coates made a for me refreshing observation.[18] It is actually the Democrats who are the conservative party in the U.S. The Democrats are those who want to uphold the status quo

13 The full transcript of the meeting:
https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/feb/28/trump-zelenskyy-meeting-transcript
If you want it with (in part horrible) voices and faces:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_jx6rPkdAhs
https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/feb/28/jd-vance-volodymyr-zelenskyy
https://www.theguardian.com/media/2025/mar/01/a-spectacle-to-horrify-the-world-what-the-papers-say-about-trump-and-vances-meeting-with-zelenskyy

14 https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/feb/17/trump-comments-nato-conference
https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2024/jan/10/donald-trump-says-never-help-europe-attack

15 https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/may/12/tsai-ing-wen-uk-visit-former-taiwan-president
https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/may/08/taiwan-president-europe-second-world-war

16 New! DOGE – Department of Energy Efficiency
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Department_of_Government_Efficiency
More about what might have been DOGE's real prime directive later.

17 Stranger Things, 2016 – 2025, created by The Duffer Brothers

because they see it as working. Not perfect, flawed in so many corners, still very much a work in progress, but working. He added that they're really having a problem in telling the story, convey it to the American people.[19] Something the party that is replacing or that already has replaced the Republican party has no problem with, albeit their version being one made up from lies. Pushing the house down, in whatever ill and devastating fashion, is making the Republicans the revolutionaries. Certainly in the eyes of their staunch voters.
The same could be said about the media outlets respective to both sides. Just as there's nothing extreme in even the 'bolder' changes proposed by the perceived 'rebel blood' on the Democratic side of the House – universal healthcare is just normal in most European countries, and no one living over here would want it any different – there's nothing radical about how the news business is being conducted by the likes of MSNBC and CNN. In CNN's case they've rather gone a good deal more cautious, but already before the election.
This might not seem so for many viewers watching from afar, who'll mostly rely on Youtube. But those won't see much of the regular news, what those outlets' channels upload are mostly the commentary-, interview- and discussion sections, the opinion pieces, in other words. And there, yes, the American outlets don't hold back, which may make them appear at least as rather outspoken when compared to their European colleagues. But that doesn't make MSNBC a 'left-leaning' network. More on the liberal side, yes, but it's only an abuse of the word, based on a lack of understanding of its meaning, that 'liberal' has become a dirty word the right is trying to feed to the people. All in all, MSNBC is still pretty conservative, in Coates' interpretation of terms.

Anyway, there was this initial period of numbness, when things had been discussed on those panels as if *things* hadn't just dramatically changed. Nothing made this denial clearer than the persistent use of 'the next four years'.[20] Almost nothing. Perhaps even further went 'the coming Midterms'. Your word in the Old Man's ear. Until we're there, what makes you so sure there'll *be* any coming Midterms? What makes you certain that what we're looking at are four years? A normal presidential term? What exactly are you not getting here?
Those were the thoughts on this side of the laptop screen.
To be clear. Maybe those hopes, because we're talking hope, not certainty, maybe they'll be confirmed. Maybe we'll make it through this. Maybe there'll be voting as usual for the Midterms, despite a fresh and massive renewal of attempts at voter restrictions as conducted by the current administration, maybe it'll land both the House and the Senate firmly in the Democrats' hands, maybe this will lead to a functioning check on the Executive Branch's actions, and maybe, come the next general election, Trump will be voted out of office and we'll have President Shapiro or President Newsom or whoever, and we can begin cleaning up the mess of those four years, and can you even begin to imagine what mess that'll be, given that it's only April and what has been done already.[21]

Maybe.

---

18 https://www.theguardian.com/news/audio/2025/apr/14/ta-nehisi-coates-on-why-stories-matter-in-the-age-of-trump-podcast
Besides this excellent episode I also recommend the podcast as such:
https://www.theguardian.com/news/series/todayinfocus

19 One might also argue that it clearly isn't working where checks & balances are concerned.

20 I could not find a briefer edit of the panellists' reactions, but over the days that followed the terms 'the next four years' and 'the coming midterms' would be invoked numerous times:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pDofGh-fJ24&t=14s

21 https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/mar/31/congress-republicans-save-act-voting-rights
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xAVnHH62Ns0

Not if it goes according to the Trump regime, pardon me, administration. Not if it goes according to those Republicans who currently control House and Senate. They have other plans. And don't bet on the power of voting. You can write Trump off as a crazy clown, while I'm not saying you're wrong you should also, by now, know better about the writing off-part. He's aware that half of America is not on his side (by now it's more than that, as in better late than never).[22] To some degree at least. Why do you think he openly 'muses' about a 3rd term?[23] And you know, if you're concerned about such trifles as the Constitution, 'we can fix that.'[24] Please be reminded that Russia holds elections, too. So does Belarus. Lukashenko must truly be an exceptionally popular president, he won 87% of the vote, after all.[25]
Or maybe there won't be any voting at all. Didn't Trump promise his voters that they only had to vote for him this time, and then wouldn't have to bother voting again?[26]

Since the period of trying to cling to the presumption of normalcy, which was facilitated by Biden still having been the President until Inauguration Day, despite the fact that Trump, not even yet in office, was already causing very direct damage, the networks have begun to wake up.[27] To be clear, there had been exceptions, to me Rachel Maddow never seemed particularly asleep.[28] Without delving too deeply in the particulars of how American democracy is being eroded, once again,

---

22 https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/apr/26/americans-republicans-trump-ratings-poll
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BMAWCapwSMY
By all means, don't take it from Mrs. Psaki alone:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FsMrauA8OGw

23 https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/mar/31/trump-running-third-term-reactions
Recently Trump has distanced himself from such ambitions, now saying he won't run for a 3rd term:
https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/may/05/president-trump-administration-news-updates-today
I'd caution that this may well be a reaction to the reaction. It's not always easy to tell whether he says something to wind up his opponents or to test the waters.

24 Try as I might, I could not find a video of this quip. But Republicans have been working on constitutional changes for a while. Republicans Push For A Constitutional Convention, 2023:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ynluq_XeGVQ

25 https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/jan/26/belarus-presidential-election-alexander-lukashenko-on-course-win

26 Trump later tried to clarify that he was specifically addressing Christians, who, in his opinion, don't vote 'well', urging them to come out and vote this time, after the election they then didn't have to vote again. Still, the 'it's gonna be fixed…' in the original speech sounds ominous:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nYZmwhNuwBA

27 In 2024 Congress was about to pass a border bill after long negotiations that was rather extreme for the Democrats, but they were in the minority -
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HmFo4NYASrk
The bill, even though it had already been agreed upon by Republicans, pandering to their priorities, was then not passed after heavy interference on Trump's behalf, who saw immigration as a campaign issue he could make use of -
https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2024/feb/07/us-senate-vote-bipartisan-border-bill
https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2024/feb/05/us-senate-border-security-aid-ukraine-bill-key-takeaways

28 Maddow's 5/6 Things series:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sedx7rkSOMc&t=1s
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=195KBkgSn4A
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EXWa08U-zn4
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Phb8oUnX3vk
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Me-Dsiz5EyQ
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=igOCeeJmnSw
I had expected/hoped that it would continue, penty of more material, after all.
Rachel Maddow, Prequel: An American Fight Against Fascism, 2023, published by Crown, ISBN 978-0-5934-4451-1

slower than I'd expected, but with exactly the same clumsiness and incompetence that just won't surprise anyone, beginning with the wait-for-it choices of cabinet members, without delving too deeply into the specifics of these efforts, I'll attend to some of it in a little while in the context of badness. Before that, for anyone who isn't all too familiar with the government backbone structure in the U.S., and perhaps even more so for those who are, let's have a look at the 3 Branches of Government in the 2nd Trump era.

The Founders have established this sectioned form of government primarily for exactly the scenario in which we find ourselves right now. More precisely, in order to avoid it.
The 3 Branches are the Executive, that's the Administration, i.e. the President and their cabinet, the Legislative, that's the two chambers of Congress, namely the House of Representatives and the Senate, and the Judicial, that'd be the courts, with the Supreme Court at the top of the judicial pyramid.[29]
In simple terms, Congress makes laws, the Administration handles federal issues outside this context and deals with foreign policy, as well as stacking federal work forces. The courts enter as a government branch when things need to get decided between the factions of the Legislative branch and/or the Administration, besides also making decisions within the realm of the every day courthouse – this, too, is a government function in that laws are also being made by means of courthouse decisions. Again, in simple terms.
There are several buffer-zones intended, meant to keep each branch in check by the two others and thus preventing corruption and abuse of power. What the House of Representatives cooks up must be confirmed by the Senate. To a certain degree the House being controlled by one party and the Senate by another can be healthy, as long as the two manage to come to any agreements at all.
The President and their cabinet, too, are not supposed to have free reign. Except for emergency situations, such as war or other disasters, and quite often also in those cases, and for the power of executive orders which a president shouldn't use to excess (…), the President cannot act willy-nilly without the agreement of Congress.[30] If issues get tough it's time for the courts, and whether issues will get tough can in principle be decided by every U.S. citizen – you can sue the government. And if one or both of the other branches don't agree with a court's decision in, say, a case of federal relevance, things will be kicked up to the Supreme Court. Which is the highest instance. A decision by the Supreme Court is final. Including one in regards to the interpretation of the Constitution.

So much for the theory.

One of the things Trump has managed to highlight like no one before him is just how much based on tradition all this is. On good will. How much trust in the institutions there had been. You may have heard the term 'constitutional crisis'. Well. Let's have a look at the options, shall we.
We don't have to suppose the kind of individual turning up the Founding Fathers have gone through the troubles of devising such a system for. For that individual is upon us. All conditionals aside, Trump has authoritarian impulses and aspirations, and he made it President. Twice. The first time around he seemed caught off guard a little, and he wasn't well prepared. Importantly, the Republican party had still been the Republican party, and Congress, more or less, quite often less, but still, Congress more or less worked. Checks and balances were brittle, but in place. The institutions wobbled, but in the end held.
This time around he came much better prepared. He'd used the interim period. And not only him. There was a new faction that had been growing within the Republican party, and that faction and Trump, a pairing made for another, and it was about to bear fruit.[31] Without holding any office he

29 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Federal_government_of_the_United_States

30 https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/may/01/trump-executive-orders

31 The most media attention-seeking bad actors of this front had been, and, with the exception of the first, still are Matt Gaetz, Lauren Boebert and Marjorie Taylor Green, and I'm gonna try and resist mentioning any of the third's

had a firm hand at shaping this new Republican party. And besides that new faction of the morally impaired he also had an army that wasn't the military. This should not be forgotten or underestimated, not only because his promise of a general pardon for the January 6th insurrectionists was kept.[32] Used to be that Republican representatives feared being booed and voted out of office. According to what their Democrat colleagues relay, what a number of their saner Republican colleagues whisper in private is very different from how they support Trump & Co. in public, but no longer out of fear for their job security, but fear for personal safety, for themselves and their families.[33] It doesn't even need a marching order of the 'stand back and stand by'- or 'will be wild'-order.[34] So far the sporadic violence hits only Democrats. Just as I write this Pennsylvania Governor Josh Shapiro's residence has partly gone up in flames after an intruder set fire to it.[35] The Governor and his family and dogs were safely evacuated in time. And of course there was the attack on Nancy Pelosi's husband Paul.[36]

Mostly it was the alliance between the new faction within the Republican party and Trump that generated a martial plan. Different from the fractioned Democrats, this front came united, and well funded and -supported by some of the richest people on the planet, because Trump is good for their business and personal agendas. It's not just Trump for whom this often repeated phrase goes – if you're unscrupulous enough as a super-rich person everything's transactional.
They were organized, they had a plan, they even had a manifesto.[37] Most importantly, they've been working on this for way more than those four years of Biden's term. Even the massive incompetence as displayed in the House of Representatives (e.g. the Elect a Speaker carousel) or later and to this day by the chosen cabinet doesn't really pose a self-imposed obstacle.[38]

---

nicknames that are lurking on my tongue, such as Klan-Mom (Jimmy Kimmel), Bleach Blonde Bad Built Butch Body (Dem.Rep. Jasmine Crockett), and White Trash Went to Washington (yours truly), and darn, I guess I just couldn't help myself.
But the rot had been there for a while, Republican Congressman Paul Gosar is only one of the more obvious examples:
https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/26/paul-gosar-far-right-republicans
And there is the current Speaker of the House, Mike Johnson. John Oliver ran a section about him in the context of his episode about the Alliance Defending Freedom. The part about Johnson begins at 11:20:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sCAuHH5EYnE

32 https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/jan/20/trump-executive-orders-jan-6-pardons

33 Only one example hereof:
https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/feb/27/republicans-trump-threats

34 'Stand back, and stand by':
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6MgfX81kWEU
The Proud Boys heard him. The 'will be wild' was part of Trump's call to come to Washington and protest the certification of votes outside the Capitol on January 6th – he was certainly right about that.

35 https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/apr/14/suspect-arson-pennsylvania-governor

36 https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/nov/13/paul-nancy-pelosi-testimony-trial-david-depape-hammer
Trump and other Republicans went on to mock Mr. Pelosi over the attack:
https://www.politico.com/news/2023/09/29/trump-mocks-pelosi-family-as-he-rallies-conservative-support-in-california-00119243
https://time.com/6226946/paul-pelosi-attack-gop-response-political-discourse/
Elon Musk, not entirely unsurprisingly, quite immediately peddled conspiracy theories about it:
https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2022/oct/30/elon-musk-twitter-baseless-conspiracy-theory-paul-pelosi-attack
The perpetrator made a full confession, later expressed remorse over his crime, and was convicted and sentenced.

37 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Project_2025

38 2023 Republican Speaker of the House Carousel:

As I said, the U.S. media outlets that are not fully in with the crime currently underway have since woken up. Woken up enough to call out Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer's old school stance as what it is.[39] Note to Senator Schumer, who's words on All In with Chris Hayes were, 'we're not there yet': dear Senator. When threatened by an autocrat in the process of taking over your country you don't wait until you're *there*. Once you're *there* it'll be too late. You don't even wait for the 11th hour. You don't wait for the 9th, 7th or 6th.
The threat not merely of Trump turning the U.S. into an autocracy but, more precisely at this point, of him completing the process is real. So. What about those checks and balances. What can be done in terms of those 3 Branches of Government?

So there's Congress… Okay, we can forget about that. Both chambers are Republican-controlled, with thin majorities, granted, but it's still enough not to allow the Democrats to pass anything. Those Republicans who still believe in, you know, a Republic, are kept in check by means of naked fear. Which alone is something to regard with a meaningful pause. It's one of those hallmarks, you know.[40]

Naturally we can also skip the Executive Branch, since that is the Administration, it's the President and his cabinet, in other words it's the throne of the troubles. No adults in the room this time.

Fine, we still have the Judiciary. We still got the courts. And the courts are presently causing this administration some headaches. Or trying to, at least. How wonderful, so that one's still working at least. Let's put our hopes and trust in the courts.
One little side note, in a system where three governmental branches are supposed to keep each other in check it's already real bad news when it's 2 to 1 in favour of no checks. When it's not two of them reining in the third. Because.
Trump has two options when a court decision doesn't suit his will. Option number one, since we're generally talking about issues of federal relevance, he can oppose a given verdict and kick it up to the Supreme Court.
Wonderful, let's put our trust and hopes in the Supreme Court!
Hang on, wait a minute…
The U.S. Supreme Court is currently stacked 6 to 3 in favour of Republicans. And some Republicans those are. There's is a binge-watch archive of deliciously disgusting scandal material to enjoy/endure regarding some of these Republican Supreme Court justices, especially the Trump-appointees, but more relevant now is the very real fear and danger of those justices facilitating the Trump administration's dearest wishes.[41] Granted, a very recent decision of this Supreme Court has

---

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/October_2023_Speaker_of_the_United_States_House_of_Representatives_election

39 The full interview with Senator Schumer on All In with Chris Hayes:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zrnnd_Cb4n4

40 Saddam Hussein taking power, as narrated by Christopher Hitchens; and I dearly hope people quit putting music on this kind of video:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OynP5pnvWOs
Now, all those who've criticised Hitchens for supporting the Iraq war, put that aside for now, the point here is to demonstrate how inseparable such a power grab is from inciting naked fear.

41 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clarence_Thomas#Moira_Smith_allegations
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samuel_Alito#Ethical_questions
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neil_Gorsuch#Personal_life
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brett_Kavanaugh_Supreme_Court_nomination#Sexual_assault_allegations

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amy_Coney_Barrett#Judicial_philosophy,_academic_writings,_speeches,_and_political_views
Amy Coney was also featured in John Oliver's episode on the Alliance Defending Freedom, see 31

confirmed a lower court's verdict obligating the administration to facilitate the return of Kilmar Ábrego García (which the administration still has to come after, as it is quite openly stalling, and there's that).[42] But do not forget. This is the same Supreme Court that has granted the President total immunity from prosecution even in case he commits a crime, as long as he commits it while in office and can make the argument that it has been committed as part of the job.[43]

But Trump doesn't even have to usher every court verdict he doesn't like up to the Supreme Court staffed with sympathetic Republican judges, quite a few of whom he had appointed. Already at the lower court's he can simply do what his administration seems to be doing with the verdict in regards to Mr. Ábrego García. Attorney and legal commentator Andrew Weissmann posted an update about the case on his Youtube channel on April 14th, just over nine hours before I'm writing this, as well as trying to answer the question what can be done if an administration elects to simply ignore a court's ruling. Weissmann's answer is apt and laconic: not much.[44]

Weissmann's colleague, former United States attorney for the Northern District of Alabama Joyce Vance (no relation to the current Vice President, I'm sure Mrs. Vance is blessing her gene-pool), puts it this way: the courts don't have an army to enforce their verdicts.[45]
As Andrew Weissmann explains in his video, in case a defendant is unwilling to comply with a verdict the enforcement agency is the United States Marshals Service – which is an agency of the Department of Justice. Which in turn is part of the Administration's turf.
Yes. Oops.
Should things get ugly it can only be hoped that the Marshals will put courts and Constitution over the individual currently working in the Oval Office (if he's not golfing).[46] It must be hoped that they

---

42 https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/24pdf/24a949_lkhn.pdf

43 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trump_v._United_States#:~:text=On%20July%201%2C%202024%2C%20the,no%20immunity%20for%20unofficial%20acts.
https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/23pdf/23-939_e2pg.pdf

44 Andrew Weissmann, 'When The Government Ignores The Courts':
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5cXvWfTQFh0

45 I'm having trouble finding the MSNBC interview with Joyce Vance in which she said this (Google-affiliated search engines are *not* optimal), but I found a conversation between her and political scientist Laura Gamboa on a iHeart podcast during which she made the same statement. There's a timing discrepancy between the slightly muddly transcript and the audio, presumably due to advertisement, in the transcript it can be found at about 16:16, in the audio at about 21:44, although I'd recommend coming in at 21:07 already:
https://www.iheart.com/podcast/1119-fast-politics-with-molly-102196036/episode/joyce-vance-laura-gamboa-271651297/
'And what we're increasingly seeing is that it will be up to the courts to fashion a remedy for a lawless president. Courts don't have armies, they can't send folks out to enforce their orders. Court orders are enforceable because as Americans we accept the power of the judicial branch, and although sometimes people push back a little bit, there is of course an appellate process. Sometimes judges have to issue orders directing parties to engage in better compliance with their orders than they have been. There has never been a moment in our history of this lawlessness where there's been open speculation that a president might simply ignore the Supreme Court. If that happens, we're in the soup, right.'
A related statement of hers can be found on her substack Civil Discourse in which she explains the courts' legal limits before warning that 'the courts aren't the cavalry. We are.'
https://joycevance.substack.com/p/the-courts-arent-the-cavalry-we-are

46 According to a site that probably had to exist in this universe, Trump has so far spent 21.43% of his presidency (2nd term) golfing, translating into 24 days:
https://trumpgolftrack.com/
If you can't see anything highlight the text.
In relation:
https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/mar/17/trump-golf-taxes

remember right from wrong just as my imaginary soldier did. Otherwise – *that* would be the feared Constitutional Crisis. It translates as Last Nail in the Coffin of Democracy.[47]

Because while the courts don't have an army to enforce verdicts, Trump does have an army. Correction. He's got two.

An update on the fate of Kilmar Ábrego García and that of possible future deportees:

not only does the Trump administration continue to refuse ensuring the release and return of an unlawfully deported man into a foreign torture prison who they admit to have deported by mistake, it would appear that they're trying to make a point of not having him returned.
It is hard to imagine a better opportunity for a U.S. president to facilitate such a return than him speaking to his counterpart residing over the country where the person in question has been sent to, and this in front of a full press corps.[48] Naturally Trump must love El Salvador's President Nayib Bukele, who has described himself as 'the world's coolest dictator'.[49] After Trump has gone on record claiming that he has no say in whether a wrongfully deported and incarcerated man can be returned to the U.S. a reporter asked Bukele directly whether he would release and return Ábrego García. He replied that he had no power to do so either. At this point there can't be any doubt: these two don't *want* the man freed and returned.
This after an unintended hot mic moment, if it was unintended, since Trump would repeat the idea in front of the reporters, in which he touted deporting U.S. citizens next to Bukele. And how amused the two were. Be done with due process and all that.
There are two aspects to this that are particularly stomach-churning. What does Bukele have to gain from this? Simple. The U.S. are paying El Salvador for incarcerating deportees.[50] With Bukele being a dictator by admission it is hard to assess to what degree this means that the U.S. is paying *him*. Just in case you wondered whether the American prison for profit system wasn't already disgusting enough.[51]
The other worrying thing that seems to emerge is that the Trump administration is using the García case to directly challenge the courts by defiance. Bring it on, courts. What you gonna do?

A few more last-minute links that relate to this section and that might be of interest:

MSNBC's Jen Psaki, Trump's power grab scheme exposed; Supreme Court birthright citizenship case focuses on court powers:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y4L3o0I4W-g

Rachel Maddow points to the militarisation of the U.S.' southern border and the potential for military arrests of American citizens:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XjPJ0N1oVnw

47 As of May 13th the courts have yet not moved to hand it over to the Marshals.

48 Full Trump/Bukele meeting:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gnh73FCfm5c

49 https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/sep/26/naybib-bukele-el-salvador-president-coolest-dictator

50 https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-pay-el-salvador-jail-300-alleged-gang-members-ap-reports-2025-03-15/
https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2025/04/18/trump-presidency-news-tariffs-deportations/

51 https://www.sentencingproject.org/reports/private-prisons-in-the-united-states/
https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/jun/16/us-prisons-jail-private-healthcare-companies-profit

The very recent White House ambush-tactic before the press, a new Trump tactic employed for those other leaders for whom he feels disdain, the contents at once debunked by the more serious commentators:
https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/may/21/trump-south-african-president-meeting
As so often it may not be entirely clear whether the duping-attempt was conducted by Trump or whether Trump had been the one being duped:
https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/may/23/trumps-evidence-of-south-africa-white-genocide-contains-images-from-democratic-republic-of-congo
This whole saga exposes the inherent racism of the Trump administration once and for all – one has to go a stretch to find justification for accepting these applicants while making life hell for all non-white asylum seekers:
https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/may/12/white-south-africans-trump

I feel I haven't treated the falsifying of history with enough urgency here, or in the section about the commonalities between dictators. But it's happening:
https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/may/17/oklahoma-high-schools-election-conspiracy-theories

Finally, two articles relating to the deportations that are worth reading:
https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/may/19/el-salvador-prison-migrants-us-report
https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/may/19/el-salvador-lawyer-arrested-deported-venezuelans

2. The Rationale of Cruelty

When peeling an onion you'll see that you can always go on. We can often suspect or plainly see reasoning behind this or that act of brutality, only to peel on and discover still more layers that might hint at something far more personal and sinister. What do we say about the torturer when he – following the predominance of men in this occupation I'll use the masculine – can go after his business with impunity, say in a context of war or in the bowels of a state-sanctioned torture chamber? We say that he lacks empathy. That's the only way we can explain why someone would fasten electrodes to another man's testicles, someone who'd never wronged him, and chase the voltages through them. How we'll explain the random beatings, the shattering of bones, the extracted fingernails, the gouged out eyes and the burnings. First you have to dehumanise the victim. Frequently the state in question has already begun this process for you. Declaring the victim an animal, worse than an animal. Vermin, a rat, or a cockroach. There you go, you're free to proceed. It's all easier if you don't feel for them.
We say something similar about the serial killer, especially should he torture. No empathy. Just as if he's pulling the limbs off a doll, only this one makes curious sounds. In a way we say this about systematic mass rape in war zones. We say that rape is being used as a weapon of war. And what is necessary for people, for men to do that is lack of empathy, dehumanising the victims, and before that, hate.
I can't fully agree with either.

I apologize in advance for being descriptive, but I really feel I have to get this point across. I think what's really going on is us dehumanising the perpetrator for reasons of emotional safety. It's easier for us to say the torturer doesn't feel anything while he's torturing another human being, except for hate. It's easier to reshape rape, including mass-rape, into an illustration of something purely mechanical, with the expressed purpose of terror being at its core. It's easier to think of the torturing serial killer as a soulless ghoul playing with a doll. It's easier to point at the monster and claiming it's not a human being, too. It's easier, because admitting that the torturer is a human being will leave you with an altogether darker picture.
When the human monsters fell over the attendees of the Nova Festival on October 7th a lot of the women they were able to catch were being gang-raped before the rapists shot them. For these women the rape by several men would be the last experience of their lives. One woman was found dead in a state indicating that she'd been raped before she was killed, and with her face burned, presumably to have *that* to be her last experience. Surviving witnesses, paramedics and medical personnel provided numerous accounts of rapes, often gang rapes, ending with the killing of the victim, as well as genital mutilations.[52]

---

52 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sexual_and_gender-based_violence_in_the_October_7_Hamas-led_attack_on_Israel# https://web.archive.org/web/20240228021555/https://www.gov.il/BlobFolder/news/arcci-submits-first-report-to-un-21-feb-2024/en/English_Swords_of_Iron_DOCUMENTS_ARCCI%20report%20-%20Hamas%20sexual%20crimes%20on%20october%207.pdf
The rape victim who was found with her face burned was identified as Gal Abdush.
It must be noted that amidst the initial accounts there had been some that would later be convincingly discredited, with the regrettable result of some people doubting the accuracy of the statements on the whole. Documentation of the atrocities were shared with politicians from several nations, including then-Secretary of State Antony Blinken - https://abcnews.go.com/International/blinken-meets-hamas-attack-survivors-pledges-us-support/story?id=103925374
- as well as with journalists, and there can be no doubt about the savagery of the attacks. Within the context of other atrocities in our history there should also be no doubt about the mass-rapes and the genital mutilations, or the burning alive of victims.
While this won't excuse the later extent of the Israeli response, lasting to this day, I find it puzzling that the subsequent demonstrations against Israel's war on Gaza, which as such I find justified, would *not* include a simultaneous demonstration against Hamas, instead tolerating the display of Hamas leaders at some of these demonstrations – anyone who's puzzled by this statement should ask themselves what the *objective* of the October 7th attacks had been. The answer: *this*. The triggering of a regional war, with no regard for Palestinian lives either, accepting them as martyrs; I think the decision of who's to be a martyr is a bad enough one when it's left to the individuals themselves, and infinitely worse when it's made by others.

There is no doubt that the mass-rape was part of the advanced planning of the attack. There should be no doubt that it was sanctioned by the planners. Perhaps it was encouraged. Terror is the objective in all this cruelty. There's no doubt either about hatred as a driver. But when we hear the phrase, 'rape as a weapon of war', and by now it's such a commonplace phrase, there is this ring of mechanisation that accompanies it. This is certainly the case for the organisers of such attacks. But, and here I have to become delicate, the actual perpetrators will have to be able to *do* it. We're talking flying bullets all around. A situation of stress. It calls for a special kind of man. A man who not only can get it up in such a situation, but for whom the situation may contribute to getting it up. Hatred alone isn't a stimulant. We're talking men who must really *want* this.
I propose that we amend the phrase, from 'rape being used as a weapon of war' to what is being used as a weapon of war being rap*ists*.
And with that we're also talking sadists. That is the only truth behind first gang-raping and then burning the face of a young woman.
We've seen similar things in Ukraine, we've seen similar things in any war zone. And while the dehumanising factor and that of lacking empathy applies with mass-rape, although here, too, we'll see often a more personalised aspect, because every mass-rape consists of individual rapes, and with that not alone of individual victims but also individual rapists and sadists, the focused torture of a victim demands more explanation than the emotion-bereft doll-abuser. Here, too, a special type of person is needed. Hate for strangers, for groups, even for entire populations can be incited. But when it comes to torture the perpetrator will face a responding individual, an individual who'll talk to him. The amount of torture found whenever an apparent situation promising impunity presents itself makes hate and even dehumanisation before the fact an unconvincing explanation. In Bucha and surrounding villages, and in the Donbas, the full extent of the cruelty was, and where it still happens is, breathtaking.[53]

It doesn't make sense for the torturer to torture what we like to say he sees as a doll, something he cannot at all identify with, which is what lack of empathy means. It is true that there is an objective on behalf of the sanctioning authorities behind this, but the tortured in Syria's dark prisons had literally been disappeared, so while you can point at terror as the objective, the individual victim was not seen or heard.[54] The terror had been achieved as far as the world outside the prison was concerned. Yet the captive still had to endure torture, often to the end.
For the torturing individual, meanwhile, there is no point in the torture if he doesn't understand what the torture does to the victim. If it really was like abusing a doll. In order to understand what the victim is going through the torturer actually *has* to have empathy. Empathy as a word doesn't only describe compassion. It describes the ability of emotionally identifying. Note that empathising with another human being doesn't necessarily mean *sympathizing*. In the case of the torturer we're looking at a different objective, that of a for him gratifying understanding of the victim's torment through his, the torturer's hand. That is the essence of sadism.
The point here is not to give torture a rational explanation as opposed to simply viewing the torturer as a monster, not a human. The point is that among us humans there are monsters.

The lesson I'm trying to get across is that the overall objective of sanctioned sadism and its personal gratifying nature on behalf of the respective torturer don't cancel each other out. In fact, it's that type of person regimes like these have use for.

Equally disturbing it was to see that the very first pro-Palestine/anti-Israel demonstrations took place in the immediate aftermath of October 7th, before Israel had even been able to launch any response.

53 https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jun/20/crimes-against-civilians-documenting-scale-abuse-ukraine https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/oct/23/electric-cables-hammers-and-guns-ukrainians-tell-of-russian-torture

54 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sednaya_Prison

From there it's needful to note that the same can easily go for the commissioner of the torture. When we look at the line of dictators throughout history – Hitler, Mussolini, Franco, Ceaușescu, Amin, Pinochet, the list is depressingly long – we see a clear and frank brutality, a personal brutality. We see a lot more they have in common, we'll get to that later. We can also see it in the present dictators, in Putin, in Kim, in Bukele. Not for the last time we have to ask ourselves, what would make a person even *want* to become a dictator. To have this much absolute power. Power of a sort that can only be kept with brutality. I will repeat this later: *wanting to be a dictator isn't normal*.
It is not a coincidence, this ambition and the clear presence of brutality, of cruelty.

That phrase we currently often hear repeated, 'cruelty is the point'. We've also heard it during Trump's previous term in context of the separation of children from their parents.[55] It is certainly true. Just as with rape and other forms of torture there is an objective here, and it is appropriate to call it a form of domestic terror. But here, too, I'd like to point at the personal, the individual aspect.

After MSNBC anchor Ali Velshi was hit by a police rubber bullet on his kneecap while doing his job at a George Floyd protest in Minnesota, Trump described the sight as 'a beautiful thing', with the crowd laughing.[56]
We all know it, we've experienced it, this schadenfreude in the face of bad luck befalling a personal enemy of ours, especially when this bad luck includes physical pain. We have to face up to it. Normally it's not symptomatic. And normally there is a defined reason behind it. Trump's disgusting delight at Velshi's injury was symptomatic, a glimpse of his sadism.

But with Trump it is. As it is with a number of his associates, as we shall see later. And where it has become symptomatic it describes a sadist.
Trump himself won't hide it. He interprets it, in himself and others, as a sign of strength. Following a long line of men who get things done this way, meaning their way. And we can see the sadist in each and every one belonging to this line, in all these tyrants. In them, too, in their very personality, the overall objective of the cruelty and its personal sadistic core don't cancel another out. In fact, the one facilitates the other. It takes a sadist to give sadistic orders, and to make sadism a policy.

Violence, meanwhile, isn't always dealt out by means of kicks and beatings, of bullets and flamethrowers. The delivery can be made by policies. Mass-deportations are violence. Passing laws that forbid half the population to decide over their own pregnancies is violence, such laws including the threat of imprisonment for doctors and healthcare workers to assist a woman in her decision is violence. 'Drill, Baby, drill' is violence, against the environment, against the many species living in it, against humanity being one of them, all who'll suffer the long list of consequences.[57] Making equity a crime is violence. Making education about uncomfortable truths a crime is violence. Restricting for the lawmaker inconvenient liberties and freedom of speech is violence. Filling cabinet positions with utterly unqualified and incompetent personnel, in some cases individuals dead set on working against the pronounced purpose of the respective department, is an act of violence. And deconstructing a democratic republic is a monumental act of violence, consisting of a

55 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trump_administration_family_separation_policy

56 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FK_bAfkoubI
Also note how the crowd dutifully cheers and applauds when Trump describes the actions on behalf of the riot police in desirable terms
https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/23/business/media/trump-ali-velshi.html

57 All in with Chris Hayes:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vAMhUoPAuQ8

conglomerate of other acts of violence, including the attacks on a free press, be it by means of ruining lawsuits or declaring them ‘the enemy of the people’ and exposing them to the danger of actual physical attacks. Barring members of the press from access is violence, too.
Not to mention siccening one’s followers on people one deems to be their enemies. Political adversaries. Judges and court clerks. People with different political convictions, different lifestyles, different ethnic backgrounds, different religions, and of different sexual orientation. Or simply for those practising their constitutional right of free speech and expression, the same right their attackers so boldly and frequently declare theirs, and theirs only.

You look at these acts and policies, these policies as acts, and of course there’s a rationale behind each of them, as well as an overall agenda. But it’s sheer impossible not to also see the commonality of blatant meanness. Of brutality, of concerted cruelty. Of all these impositions being *against* people, and none of them *for* them, not for any, really. Not *for* the betterment of anything, except for the small group of the richest already-have-alls. As with the meaner seeming, in the other sense of the word, murdering torturer, the rationale and the manner of execution don’t cancel each other out. They don’t conflict with another in the least.

I’ve mentioned the example of Kilmar Ábrego García and the Trump administration’s refusal to bring him home despite court orders, including that by the Supreme Court, compelling them to. Bukele’s rationale behind the utterly absurd claim that it wasn’t in his power to free the man and send him back (and there’s that, as so often, the blatant in-the-face lie that everybody knows is a lie, ‘go on, what you gonna do about it?’) looks clear enough. The U.S. is paying money for these incarcerations, and on top of that he’s going full buddy with the President of the United States. For a person who calls a hell like the Centro de Confinamiento del Terrorismo (CECOT) into existence the image of a cruel, heartless bastard who doesn’t care about the collateral of innocent people enduring it will be a bonus.
But for the Trump administration the lawsuits and the court decisions should be a headache. Why not going the much easier way by initiating the return of someone they themselves admit to have deported by mistake? There’d be merit in that, too. ‘Yes, we’ve made a mistake, and we’re capable of admitting it, and we’re bringing him back, here he is, *Kilmar*, his name is *Kilmar*, many people don’t know that, I’ve met him yesterday, great man, he came to me, tears in his eyes, and he said, thank you, Sir, thank you, Mr. President…’
Instead…
Which is why I think there’s a point in this refusal, and it’s not only about wanting to appear tough, or about not wanting to admit how flawed even the cruelty is. What began as an example for how and why the mass-deportations are so dangerous not only for accused criminals – stress on *accused*, we’re talking denial of due process, constitutionally not only guaranteed to every U.S. citizen, but everyone *living* in the U.S. - has turned into an opportunity for Trump. The moment any law professor worthy the title fears is upon us. Trump demonstrating that the 3rd Branch of Government is powerless. It could have been anything. It happens to occur on the back of this one wrongfully deported man.
There’s a weak hope in me that Trump may still cave. Pushing it, to see how far this will go, but then caving in the end. I must say it’s a hope I cling to for Mr. Ábrego García’s sake. I have little confidence. One more thing I’d be happy to have been wrong about.

Even if you do manage to strip away the emotions when watching the calculation behind all this, the pure malice won’t escape you. The callous mentality of walking across corpses and misery for the purpose of personal gain and plain intimidation. Cruelty is not only the point. It’s also the means for the autocrat to feel powerful.
To be clear, I should stress this once more, when talking about calculation you shouldn’t be impressed, I’m not referring to higher maths here. Where it regards Trump himself the overall aim is of a short-term nature, and much of it has more to do with impulse. Don’t ever mistake the

opportunism, or this ‘talent’ for distraction for brightness. It’s something learned, the cheap trickster carton box of the habitual fraudster. Having taught himself that the gullible are easy and imagine everyone as being gullible. And those who’re not, to hell with them.
It’s self-conditioned. No reason to be impressed, you can condition the behaviour of an earthworm. No joke. You can.
Besides that, the strategy of flooding the arena with distractions is also program, and the idea isn’t Trump’s alone, we’ll get to that.

Violence you also see in the attack on science. Outside the application of the word in music (where there’s such a thing as ‘soft attack’) an attack always implies some sort of violence. The attack on science is no less brutal than any of the others. And it is being launched as a broadside.
The objective here can be named by replacing the word science with truth, and to be frank, the attack on Truth is not solely a strategy employed by the far right, or in fact only by dictators and dictator wanna-bes. It’s also not terribly new, rather terribly commonplace by now.
When reading Orwell’s ‘Nineteen Eighty-Four’ as a shorter person the idea of a revision of truth seemed at first grotesque, implausible, more allegoric than something people could allow to really happen.[58] Of course my impression was already wrong at conception, and short-lived. The novel isn’t merely a warning about what could happen, but what had already been put into practice numerous times. None of all this is particularly new. Only the media formats in use have evolved.

And pretty much every ideology can be accused of making use of the strategy, even, at times, if unwittingly. Advertisement frequently aims at ‘altering’ the truth (euphemism for lying) quite wittingly.
In fact, to what degree one other aspect has intensified or not I’ll leave to the elders, namely just how easy we as the populus are making it. Carl Sagan warned of the dangers of the disconnect between technological development and people’s lack of understanding this technology, calling it a prescription for disaster.[59] What goes for tech goes, more generally, for just knowing stuff. If you don’t understand a thing, how can you make an informed decision about it? Anything, whether you’re for it or against it, whether you support it or want to avert it, whether you want to believe it or have an immediate aversion against accepting its possibility – if you don’t *at all* understand the subject in question, it’s not just that your opinion of it is full of holes, incomplete, or flawed in its thinking about this or that aspect. *That* can and will occasionally happen once you’ll have engaged with the given subject, you’ll always know less in the beginning compared with later, and there are always people who’ll be able to point out this or the other objection to you.
But if you haven’t done *any* homework, if you don’t understand the subject at all, then the truth is that you don’t even *have* an opinion. Repeating ready-made, fully processed and unquestioned sound-bites composed by others isn’t an opinion. That’s just parroting. How much does the parrot understand of the word it repeats?[60]

Examples for that are plenty. One of my favourite is what happens when, against the odds, you somehow manage to get a small bunch of pandemic restriction complainers to listen for once (I

---

58 George Orwell, Nineteen Eighty-Four, 1949, Secker & Warburg

59 *‘We've arranged a global civilization in which most crucial elements profoundly depend on science and technology. We have also arranged things so that almost no one understands science and technology. This is a prescription for disaster. We might get away with it for a while, but sooner or later this combustible mixture of ignorance and power is going to blow up in our faces.’*
Carl Sagan, The Demon-Haunted World: Science as a Candle in the Dark, 1995, Random House, ISBN 0-345-40946-9

60 Turns out, parrots can get to understanding the meaning of quite a few words, but they begin by imitating sound as part of their bonding process. Only from there they begin to make connections between objects and actions and the related, repeated human words. On average parrots seem to do a better job than many adult humans, in this respect.

repeat, a small one, once it's a larger group, forget about it). If circumstances allow, ask them for a show of hands, 'those among you who can explain to me what a virus is.'
Spectacular.
And yet, here we are, and those who dedicate their lives to the better understanding of disease, our planet's climate, nature, the cosmos, have become suspect in the eyes of many of those who haven't put the least bit effort into beginning to understand the respective subject, while indulging the rest of us with spurious yet unabashedly audacious theories and opinions.

It becomes particularly depressing when seeing this in academia. The philosophers of old, whose arguments must always be read in the light of all the things discovered since their time, they at least tended to consult what was available to them about the nature of things, about the world, about the cosmos. And mind you, the internet had not been among those means. They had to travel, meet with people of science (lamentably mostly men), journey to libraries, spend good money to collect their own books, and of course go to school before that to learn how to read them and how to write their own. And, of course, they had to leave the house and have a long, good sit-down and think. Many of the philosophers, scientists and doctors were Jacks of more than one Trade (again, fewer Janes, though not for lack of trying). In fact, quite a few were some or even all of the above. The idea of a synthesis of disciplines would not have shocked them.
In today's world of science it is abundantly clear. You cannot be a geologist without a solid understanding in chemistry. You cannot be an astronomer with a solid knowledge in both. And physics. And mathematics. There's no discipline in science that doesn't include others as a basics for understanding.
This also means that with the progress in the accumulation of this understanding, facilitated by ever refined technology, the challenge grows for other faculties, for instance that of the philosophers. There's now a ton of homework to be done. But the answer mustn't be the lazy one. The one that heaves us, the human, out of and away from the context of the world. It mustn't be this renaissance of solipsism, so worryingly embraced by a baffling number among us.

And yet. I now look at the emerging academics from four (4) renowned philosophy academies who first looked puzzled when I asked what role evolution has played in their studies before, variably, expressing that evolution was irrelevant to those studies, or even that it was ethically ambiguous, not to mention the apparently inevitable invocation of the 'only a theory'. It always takes only the most tender feather stroke to unearth an utter lack of understanding what the principle, the basics of which you can learn during a single afternoon with internet access, entails. Granted, they can still all quote the old philosophers, the same philosophers who had to put in so much more effort to obtain the material they based their ideas on, and who had frequently be quite the renaissance people (in a different meaning of the word this time). Quote them, though often irrespectively the gap in time, during which some of what had been thought back then had to be revised.
Of course this doesn't go for all academics, and maybe it was just my bad luck to get the lazy ones. But in the cases of those graduating from 3 of those 4 faculties, and in two cases I'm talking about more than one person, what goes for evolution also went for basics in physics and chemistry, among other subjects. To divorce what is somewhat tiresomely often called 'the human condition' from the context of more than 4.5 billion years of geological and soon after biological history, inseparable from the physics and chemistry enabling, accompanying and resulting from it, that's like reading the last syllable of the final word on the last page of a very, very fat book, and thereby judging and interpreting it.
It doesn't work.
Except for the pied pipers, of course.

In- and outside academia the groundwork for this push of truth-denial, and consequently the success of mis- and disinformation campaigns, has been laid for a while, and sometimes even in good faith, by means of plain, old thoughtlessness. A lesson to be learned about why we have words. For

example, Kellyanne PutMeOnTV's infamous 'alternative facts' have a predecessor, and that one could and, lamentably, can still be found on the left of the circle.[61] It's the sadly reliable 'you have your truth, and I have mine'.
Alright, I get that what whoever used this darn phrase the first time probably used the word *truth* as interchangeable for *perception*, this leading to a certain *perspective*. Or more precisely, I *hope* so. Still, cursed be their name. Because if you repeat a catch-phrase often enough, you'll inevitably have it end up in the ears of those who'll take it verbatim, and the damage is done. Hence the importance of accurate choice of words. A *perception* is not the same as truth. A perception can also be the result of a hallucination, of a misinterpretation, a misidentification. And a resulting *perspective* can be flawed as a result of that. It all begins with limited senses and a tendency for bias. Look at the Crab Nebula in visual light, and you'll see the famous blue, green and brown filigrees. Look at it in infrared, for which we need an exterior instrument because we can't see in the infrared wavelength, and it'll look quite different. Look again in ultraviolet, in X-rays, by means of radar. All different. And all true. To an extent. The closest to the truth, to how the thing really looks, you'll get when combining all these images into one.
It's a good exercise to remind ourselves: *the truth is not ours*. It is only ours to *discover*. By and by, to eventually, gradually, hopefully understand it.[62]
Mind you, some truths are less complex and far more obvious than others.
And yet.

Who wonders then that the unwillingness to do the basic homework makes fodder of even some of the most well-meaning crusaders for good causes. If you happen to be a campaigner for the sake of our planet and the life on it who wants to raise awareness of both the climate catastrophe and the lack of enthusiasm where it is about combating it, *please, pretty please,* do the basic homework about it. Otherwise it takes no more than a single lobbyist with only the smarts of half his buttock to point out flaws in your argument, and you not only lost a battle, you damaged the whole war effort.

Anyway. The field is fertile, is what I'm saying. And in our landscape where the complaints, objectives and tactics of the far right and the far left sound and look ever more suspiciously identical (in truth we've simple gone far enough along the brim of the rather small circle), it takes no more than one Conway to sway members of both factions.
I hasten to add that presently the much more worrisome gains and victories are that of the far right in the context of this effort. The point is, there's much movement on the far left that is making it easy for them.

The broadside fired by the Trump administration on science and thus truth threatens to, and to some degree already has begun to leave a number of targets in shreds. Again we see a collaboration between malice and objective. And power play is always part of the game.
To some degree it became somewhat personal for me as soon as the tentacle began touching NASA, as space exploration is something very, very dear to me. NASA has been seeing itself confronted with a number of dilemmas for a while, mostly of ethical nature, which to my mind intensified with Putin's invasion of Ukraine, February 2022, as well as due to the dependence on SpaceX and its rockets as a space delivery vehicle both for payloads and personnel, and with that the dependence on Elon Musk, leading me to write an on some level helpless piece on these dilemmas.[63]

---

61 And would you know it, 'Alternative Facts' have their own Wikipedia page:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alternative_facts#
Kellywise:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hlt3rA-oDao

62 A related quote is commonly attributed to Mark Twain:
'Don't go around saying the world owes you a living; the world owes you nothing, it was here first.'
It's actually not certain that it was Twain who'd said it. Sounds like something he'd say, though.

It's not the first time that a Trump administration had ideas about NASA. Trump himself understands little if anything about nature outside Earth's atmosphere (or indeed within it), nor about the exploration efforts under way or in planning. In his first administration he once described the moon as being part of Mars.[64] During the joint space walk conducted by astronauts Christina Koch and Jessica Meir, the first all-female EVA on the exterior of the ISS, Trump made a scheduled phone call, called the event the first space walk conducted by women (which had actually been done by Svetlana Savitskaya in 1984), and monotonously read out a few facts about the two astronauts from a piece of paper for him that were supposed to lead to a question for the two busy women. The whole interruption was mercifully cut short due to a communication outage.[65]
Clearly Trump has no interest in this kind of exploration, other than for what may serve as prestige projects. That's not to say that he has no interest in what NASA is doing, or shall we say, what he wished they were *not* doing.
During his first term his administration proposed crippling slashes to one particular division within NASA's program.[66] The President will make such a proposal as part of the all-over budget suggestions, forwarding them to Congress, which will then decide over the budget point by point. In NASA's case it's not one single amount of cash for the agency that is being discussed, but the individual budget amounts for each division, such as planetary and stellar science as well as individual missions. It is up to the Congress to what extent the President's suggestions will be respected, if at all. The President can only recommend.[67]

---

63 D.C. Ceva, Safety vs Integrity - the Space Agencies' Ethical and Other Dilemmas in the 2020s and the 2nd Trump Era:
https://archive.org/details/safety-vs-integrity

64 There are two possibilities here.
The comment was part of a Tweet in which Trump criticised NASA for preparing for a mission to the moon instead of focusing on going straight to Mars.
https://www.theguardian.com/science/2019/jun/07/trump-moon-is-part-of-mars-tweet-nasa
As is often the case with him, people at once started wrecking their brains, trying to figure out what on Earth he could mean. A more well-meaning interpretation had him meaning something to the effect that both the moon and Mars are part of the same project, the Artemis mission (one should call it the 1st prep stage of a future mission), which would first bring humans back to the moon, to eventually lead to the next step to Mars, possibly from the moon:
https://www.nasa.gov/feature/artemis/
An interpretation that doesn't quite make sense in the context of criticising NASA for planning this sequence, but then Trump's mind is subject to sudden changes, as Jimmy Kimmel pointed out:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j7jE83I9tkY
I figure there might be another explanation, because around that time several videos were posted on Youtube and elsewhere, including by NASA, explaining how our moon had most likely come into existence, namely by a large *Mars-size* object slamming into young Earth when both had still been hot and mushy. It is quite possible that Trump had only listen with half an ear, walking away with the impression that Mars had slammed into Earth, creating the moon.
Naturally it could also be a combination of the two.

65 https://www.nasa.gov/blogs/spacestation/2019/10/18/nasa-astronauts-wrap-up-historic-all-woman-spacewalk/
Trump's call:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j29dU3e4F4c
I hope I'm not getting anyone into trouble, but I've actually watched the entire spacewalk of the two (I'm very fond of both Koch and Meir), and the Trump call then on a different tab. If there was a communication break-up it would have been between Washington and Houston, because during that entire period communication between ground and the ISS was uninterrupted.

66 https://www.planetary.org/articles/20170306-trumps-first-nasa-budget
Well, to more than one, but it's Earth Science I'm referring to here

67 The go-to person in all things space policies is the Planetary Society's Casey Dreier:
https://www.planetary.org/profiles/casey-dreier

While Trump announced a return to the moon and American boots on Mars with much pomp and circumstance in a manner suggesting he felt like John F. Kennedy (missions of this magnitude take many years and many setbacks until they're realised, we're still not close to going to Mars, not even as close to returning to the moon as we'd want to, and even two presidential terms would not have seen him residing over this, so the announcement was symbolic), he forwarded his actual budget recommendation in which the proposed money for Earth Science had been shrunken to a ridiculous amount. Earth Science includes everything NASA and JPL can observe and help with in terms of environmental challenges, most significantly the heating climate. The recommended slashing would have basically disabled much of these efforts, and the objective behind that is obvious. Blind us to the truth of the climate catastrophe and there'll be little left to prove. The fossil fuel industry will be happy.
Luckily, and although both the House and the Senate had been Republican-controlled at the time, the Republican party had not yet wholly become the cult of the worshippers and the fearful it is now, and the presidential recommendations for NASA's Earth Science weren't followed.

Things are very different this time around.
I wrote the aforementioned piece after the heart-and gut-sinking swift and ready obedience on behalf of acting NASA administrator Janet Petro, who not only ended all DEI programs within NASA and removed all traces of them from the agency's website, but issued a bulletin advising all NASA personnel to report violations observed in the actions of colleagues in blunt McCarthy-style, as if anything that could fall under the definition, while de facto being a removed program, was an actual crime, effectively not merely asking, but obligating staff to snitch on another.[68]
I added that the administrator's primary job in such a situation is to protect the personnel, as well as the very important, long worked on and expensive missions, and that the unquestioning following of the Trump directives could plausibly be interpreted this way, given that NASA is a government agency, their choices thereby being limited, but I also asked at what price all this comes. I call my effort somewhat helpless because in the end I was still lost as to a solution, other than that of quiet but firm resistance, which would have plausibly come at the cost of major missions, something that would have broken my heart – I'd like to be alive when Dragonfly arrives at Titan – but here we are.[69]

Right now I'm feeling a little more confident with my suggestion, seeing what little good the obedience has brought NASA. Instead of 'merely' wanting to slash Earth Science, it seems the Trump administration now wants to do away with everything it doesn't deem necessary or interesting to them, speak Science as such (anything SpaceX is involved with is likely exempted), by means of a budget an agency affiliate called 'a potential extinction-level event for NASA science'.[70] And although the majorities are slim, both the House and the Senate are again Republican-controlled, and this time it's full-on MAGA world.

The first thing I thought when reading about this was 'rabies'.
The rabies virus is a pathogen that wants to get into the brain. It enters nerve endings that have been severed by a bite, using the nerves as a highway to the brain, thus circumventing two obstacles: the

68 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Janet_Petro#Acting_NASA_administrator
'As director of NASA, she eliminated the Diversity and Inclusion office, in compliance with an executive order by Donald Trump. She requested that employees report their colleagues for changing contract descriptions and threatened "adverse consequences" for employees who did not "report" violations.'
https://spacenews.com/nasa-shutters-diversity-offices-to-comply-with-executive-order/

69 https://science.nasa.gov/mission/dragonfly/

70 https://www.planetary.org/planetary-radio/2025-extinction-level-event-for-nasa-science
The page offers a transcript of the discussion. An edited version of the transcript can be viewed here:
https://www.planetary.org/articles/nasa-science-cuts-discussion

organism's immune response, which focuses on the blood vessels and is absent in the nervous system, and the blood/brain barrier, meant to protect the central nervous system, the brain, against an invasion via the blood vessels.
Contrary to some belief, it is not established that the virus specifically targets the areas in the brain that control aggression. The way it rather looks is that the virus goes all over the brain, the most convincing theory having it over-stimulate the brain, leading to an intensifying of more than one emotion, including fear, as well as to agonizing cramps and spasms, and also causing what's known as hydrophobia, a condition unique to rabies, conditioning an aversion to water and other liquids in connection with painful throat-spasms ('throttling'), leaving the victim ever more thirsty while the virus-infested saliva collects in the mouth, which serves as further transmission means with the next bite, closing the cycle.
All of which is pretty elaborate for an organism so simple (a wad of RNA, a few proteins, a couple of enzymic master-keys, there's your virus) that many deny it the prestigious title of lifeform.
The point is control. A pathogen aiming to take over the brain should always worry us.[71] The way that the virus makes the host become aggressive – by apparently *not* specifically targeting the related brain areas but the entire brain – compares to cluster-bombing when being after a single target. Erase the whole block, if the terrorist was in there it'll do.
Eradicating means to further our knowledge courtesy NASA's science missions is something that would play into this administration's hands in other ways, as we shall see, so it's not exactly collateral; neither is anything else triggered by the rabies virus' over-stimulating the whole brain.
The effects of removing these means are welcome, but the cluster-bombing of NASA's science missions will also hit the number one 'terrorist', Earth Science, and with it the furthering of our understanding of how to combat the climate catastrophe – an absolutely indispensable component in our efforts to save the habitability of our planet, and also a thorn in the side of the fossil fuel industry, the mouths of the CEOs of which that are already dripping with saliva before the promises made by President Drill, Baby, Drill.

Besides the rather transparent benefits Mr. Trump can expect from giving certain industries a carte blanche while depriving us of the means to assess and combat the climate crisis and other, increasingly related environmental damages, beginning with the rape of land and sea, the meanness and the malice in their own right show here as well, and as a double feature. Foremost they present themselves as total indifference if not outright disdain toward the living world. There's a related feature regarding other animal species we'll have a look at later.
Trump is often described as a climate change denier. I'm actually not so sure about that where it concerns his private, unspoken views. Equally plausible is that he isn't even there, that he hasn't moved to any conclusion. He simply doesn't care. The life that is destroyed in the process of destroying the environment, the species that go extinct, mean nothing to him, never mind that without them our own species won't be able to survive either, since the seemingly slow end is not something he'll be around for to experience.
Secondly, the malice can be seen in how joyful he is when dashing the hopes of those who're trying to keep this planet habitable. Yet another facet of sadism. He sees strength in brutality and weakness in the sentiment of preservation. Just alone in the sense of sentiments, it's a double win for him.

The same can in all likelihood be said about all the destruction and deconstruction initiated by the man, not only is all of it, without exception, anti-life, anti-joy, anti-progress and anti-preservation, he makes no attempt to hide the glee over the angry and, at this point at least on the surface helpless reactions, the pain and the fear he's causing. It's at once a source for feeling powerful and joy.

71 Tobin et al - Why COVID-19 Silent Hypoxemia Is Baffling to Physicians: https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7397783/pdf/rccm.202006-2157CP.pdf

Much has been said about not only how wrong Trump is about the effects of his idée fixe, grand-scale tariffs, but also how clumsy and arbitrary, and in cases transparently insane the execution is. You know. Penguins.
You may count his reasons for doing something the whole world, minus half a handful of anointed and incompetence-dripping sidekicks, tells him is breaking a record in stupid. One should also consider the single individual having reached the highest office who now sees the *entire world* scramble, and all he had to say were the words. Never mind the consequences. Consider the ego-boost.[72]
Of course he and his most valuable supporters, supporters with a value stamp on them, don't have to fear those consequences themselves, and it's not only the tax-cuts.

A detail in another update on Kilmar Ábrego García may serve as a segue to the next and at least one other section to follow.
Democratic Senator Chris Van Hollen managed to see Ábrego García in El Salvador.[73] At first he wasn't even granted a visit, which is remarkable because access had clearly been easy for a few jolly, disgusting photo ops as long as it were Republicans visiting, no such visit having been more repulsive than that of The New Village People cosplayer Kristi Noem.[74]
But the Senator from Maryland was relentless, and so finally a meeting was arranged. Notably in what looked like a hotel lobby, and Ábrego García was dressed in everyday clothes, not the white CECOT outfit.
Bukele, clearly still thinking he's the coolest dictator, commented on the encounter with a tweet:

> *'Kilmar Abrego Garcia, miraculously risen from the "death camps" & "torture", now sipping margaritas with Sen. Van Hollen in the tropical paradise of of El Salvador! (cocktail emoji)'*

Bukele later added another tweet to the first, they can be both enjoyed together:

> *'Now that he's been confirmed healthy, he gets the honor of staying in El Salvador's custody (American flag emoji, handshake emoji, El Salvador flag emoji)'*[75]

Right. We'll be getting to the commonalities between dictators. Cynicism would be one of them.

Easy to see how Bukele would add that second tweet, remembering to make sure we all understand that the meeting with Senator Van Hollen so doesn't mean at all that Ábrego García will be released.
Whatever happened to the oh so powerless dictator who isn't able to facilitate the man's return to the country from where he'd been unlawfully deported? How much power and influence do you need to just let it go by letting the man go with the Senator right then and there?
It would seem that the money the U.S. pays for keeping him incarcerated by you, money you could live without, given the number of prisoners for which the U.S. is also paying, isn't all there is for a reason. But there's certainly that, too.

---

72 *'I run the country, and the world.'*
https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2025/06/trump-second-term-comeback/682573/
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MBP23NKcoew

73 MSNBC Exclusive, Senator Chris Van Hollen talks with Rachel Maddow live from El Salvador:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_lRgr3G21Ig

74 https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/mar/27/kristi-noem-el-salvador-prison-visit-trump-admin

75 https://www.instagram.com/p/DIkes6Ix7iX/?img_index=3
Yes, I'm aware that it's called 'X' now.

As for Trump, among all the wrongs he's doing denying a wrongfully deported man release and return to face a fair hearing is only one. And especially with the threat of deportation now also looming for U.S. citizens, the whole affair is also a bonus for Mr. Trump as it incites fear. If they so blatantly deny the first wrongfully deported who attracts this much attention any chance for assistance, how well do you think you'll fare if you happen to be #1024?
Don't rely on the charges having to be terrorism or being a gang member (not to mention that no such charges had been officially brought). Trumped-up charges, pun intended, could be anything. Say, you being *un-American*.

A few last-minute links pertaining to subjects touched in this segment.

A Today in Focus podcast episode dedicated to journalist Viktoriia Roshchyna, I deeply recommend to give it a listen:
https://www.theguardian.com/news/audio/2025/may/22/vika-the-journalist-who-exposed-russian-black-sites-then-ended-up-in-one-podcast
And a related article about the infamous prison/torture site where she died:
https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/apr/30/inside-taganrog-beatings-electrocution-and-starvation-at-prison-where-ukrainians-were-tortured

3. The Grift

As a little trailer for an upcoming section, one of the more obvious commonality between dictators is that they're all thieves.
Kleptocracy is among the most reliable features that mark an autocracy, both in terms of the system (the henchmen and -women want to benefit and prosper) and naturally of the dictator. The shrinks of the world who opt to assess such personalities and systems really ought to have a good think about that. Quite obvious is the comparison to a crime syndicate, because basically we're looking at the same thing here.

And there is so much opportunity coming with all the possible excesses a dictatorship can and will provide. Starting with other countries. You need a reason, you can simply declare that the other nation doesn't really exist, that it is historically part of your nation. That it should come back 'heim in's Reich', so to speak. Other nations you wish to welcome into the Reich freshly, and you follow a very old tradition, that of the Huns, and of several individuals named Khan.[76] Once you've pocketed them, it's about spoils of war. The Huns did it, why shouldn't you. Of course, those countries who allowed annexation without a fuss, to varying degrees of choice, don't need to be robbed blind as whatever they produce is from now on what your Reich produces.
Spoils can be anything. Spoils are everything. The produce of agriculture, rare earth resources, all earth resources, territory, whatever the local treasury offers, this or that nuclear power station.[77] And art. Again and again, art. Any art for the value, and a specific type of art that doesn't fall under 'entartete Kunst' for satisfying the little Liberace in you.

But that is the theft coming with the occupation, and in part motivating it. There's more theft that begins before that, not every little dictator has the means to annex other countries, after all. Another source are the people of one's own country, and with equal frequency, namely always. Pick your dictator.
After the 4th President of Ukraine, Viktor Yanukovych, had been chased out of the country and to his sugar daddy, the people of Ukraine learned what many had presumably already suspected, namely that good old Viktor knew how to live.[78] In principle the same could be said for every Ukrainian, only that they as the people weren't allowed to, certainly not to the extent Yanukovych reserved for himself, and now they're not allowed because they're getting killed.
After Yanukovych escaped a rising number of criminal cases were opened against him, the charges including treason, mass murder and bribery, and also fraud, property theft and embezzlement.[79]
Most Ukrainians had to make good with pay-checks significantly below what you'll earn in the west, and the perhaps most infamous symbol of the disparity between the average income and the wealth of the man who was supposed to act on the people's behalf and for their benefit became exhibit once the people entered the property of the Mezhyhirya Residence, Yanukovych private palace.[80] The sight of ordinary Ukrainians browsing through the rooms of this luxurious palace for one man and his small family is unforgettable.

---

76 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Attila
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genghis_Khan
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kublai_Khan

77 https://www.enseccoe.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/F2.jpg
https://www.reddit.com/media?url=https%3A%2F%2Fi.redd.it%2Flsh1v09g2zob1.jpg
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zaporizhzhia_Nuclear_Power_Plant

78 Besides cash assets and his Mezhyhirya Palace itself, among the items important to make Yanukovych's life bearable were jets and helicopters, naturally yachts, quite a few dozens of cars, a Charles Foster Kane-like attachment to sculptures, and a private zoo.
https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/yanukovych-luxury-residence-and-money-trail-that-leads-to-london/
https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/exclusive-ukrainian-assets-owned-or-used-by-ousted-president-viktor-yanukovych-hidden-behind-trail-of-firms-with-links-to-uk-9161504.html
Thanks to this inspirational video of Alex Wagner reporting from a demonstration in Budapest, I've now learned that Viktor Orbán, too, enjoys his own little zoo - with zebras:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ot-u9-TsXzw

79 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Viktor_Yanukovych#Criminal_cases

80 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mezhyhirya_Residence
Make sure to also image-search for the interior.

Yanukovych did not have to fear poverty in exile, meanwhile. It is alleged that he bought a house in Barvikha, near Moscow, for $52 million converted dollars. Barvikha is known as a ‘luxury village’.[81]

It can be safely assumed that Syrian scourge and dictator Bashar al-Assad also doesn’t live off scraps in his Russian exile.[82] Nor will his host ever.[83] It’s the same with all the thugs in highest position. Assets worth anything between multi-millions and billions to which the respective official salary compares like a fingernail-chip, expansive, luxurious properties, and yachts, again and again yachts, and you know, not the cheap hulks. Yachts are also the thing among the wealthy enablers, the oligarchs of this world. So popular are they, I can’t quite decide to what degree it must have stung when the yachts of numerous of the Putin-siding Russian oligarchs were confiscated around the world, if at all.[84]

When it comes to enriching, all these dictatorial systems appear perfectly identical with Mafia families. Trump, who positively fits with the image by deed and impression, certainly behaved like a Don during his court appearances, not shying from issuing threats and accusations aimed at court personnel, whenever he was awake, and receiving several gag-orders.[85]
And with Trump the thieving- and grifter mentality goes way back, and mind you, he’s a walking reminder: one doesn’t even have to be good at it. What do you expect from someone getting his own casinos to nose-dive into the dunes?[86] Trump University was so obviously a scam, you have to put an effort into sympathizing with the victims.[87] The real estate industry as such isn’t exactly a natural habitat for honesty, empathy and common decency, and Trump managed to get a bad name

---

81 This is according to Russian politician and environmentalist Oleg Mitvol:
https://korrespondent.net/ukraine/politics/3312452-yanukovych-kupyl-dom-v-barvykhe-za-52-mln-rossyiskyi-polytyk
(in Ukrainian)
According to the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs, Yanukovych lives in a compound provided to international guests. Which is still comfortable enough.

82 https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/global-trends/syria-bashar-al-assad-the-curious-case-of-assads-clan-mission-billions/articleshow/116366123.cms?from=mdr
https://www.dw.com/en/syria-where-is-bashar-assads-money/a-71071087

83 Wikipedia states the Russian President’s annual salary as US$ 120 000 (8 900 000 roubles) - US$ 140 000, according to the Hindustan Times. If all’d be kosher it’d be quite a fiscal trick Putin is pulling out of the hat (or part of his physiology), as he’s estimated to be among the richest people on Earth:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/President_of_Russia
https://www.statista.com/statistics/1154099/annual-income-of-vladimir-putin/
https://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/world-richest-politician-is-worth-200-billion-owns-700-cars-is-not-from-india-101729318585498.html

84 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yachts_impacted_by_international_sanctions_following_the_Russian_invasion_of_Ukraine
There are things some of us would never think of imagining that exist. For instance something named Superyachts Times:
https://www.superyachttimes.com/yacht-news/update-on-russian-yachts-seized

85 https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2024/apr/16/trump-new-york-hush-money-criminal-trial
https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/article/2024/jun/18/trump-hush-money-gag-order
Intimidation and subsequent vindictiveness wouldn’t stop before judges:
https://www.reuters.com/investigations/these-judges-ruled-against-trump-then-their-families-came-under-attack-2025-05-02/

86 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trump_Entertainment_Resorts

87 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trump_University

even amongst many of those of the same trade.[88] The deception already begins with the mentality, the calling yourself something you're not, and inflating your wealth and the value of your assets is where it becomes a crime in the name of the law.[89]
I'm not really in the vein to tick off all the occasions on which he'd been lying to investors or trying to fleece people, you can consult the court records for that, he's been involved in enough law suits. There's also something cheap and greasy about this mentality, you'd frown and turn away if you'd encounter it in the streets. Even after he'd acquired the presidency, both times, he'd continue to try and hawk trash for cash, virtual trading cards depicting him as muscular superheroes in all kinds of roles, the exact real value of which is zero to anyone with common sense, golden sneakers, expensive watches, should anyone from his base fancy giving up their houses, belongings, savings, perhaps a kidney, and spouses, Trump coins, and of course, Trump Bibles, for those who got something left after putting some of the little they have in the little wicker basket.[90] Every time such an ad comes out I'm reminded of the 80s, when some grimy looking Mike Lindell-ancestor was trying to sell a new fitness gadget on the telly that upon purchase turned out to be made of plastic and fell apart as soon as you started using it.
For Trump it's all about money, and money is all about status. So he tries to make money where he can, in any way he can, including illegal ways, and also those that are frankly embarrassing. Bad father that he is, he's hammered the grifter mentality into his children, with the result that one would rather spend quality time with Leatherface's family.[91]

So natural it comes to him and his cronies that an opportunity is grabbed amidst the wildest chaos as if it was nothing. The latest example is the tariff war, not only did he announce the most insane tariffs for imports from around the world, hitting besides China foremost America's traditional allies (and penguins), notably not touching the country led by the other individual with the worst influence on the planet, Russia, he then made it still worse by injecting the element of greatest uncertainty by pausing, un-pausing, pausing… Before exacting yet another push to the worldwide trade-Armageddon named Freedom Day and expecting a reaction of relief on Wall St., and already having sent the stocks reeling, pushing prices further up and making everyone seriously fearing for their retirement money, there came his message, good time for investments. The message was apparently heard and heeded by a number of Republicans in office, including Georgia Representative Marjorie White Trash Went to Washington Taylor Greene, as by now famously pilloried by AOC[92]. One more thing among the mounting ones that, had they happened under, say,

88 https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2016/02/29/the-myth-and-the-reality-of-donald-trumps-business-empire/
https://www.newyorker.com/news/our-columnists/as-a-businessman-trump-was-the-biggest-loser-of-all

89 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_York_business_fraud_lawsuit_against_the_Trump_Organization
From the New York State Attorney's office:
https://ag.ny.gov/sites/default/files/tto_release_properties_addendum_-_final.pdf

90 I decided against even linking to any of the Trump trash, virtual trading cards, golden sneakers, Trump bibles, and watches, you heard me, watches, wanna find out more, knock yourselves out. And mind you. This continues into the presidency.

91 https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2025/05/12/the-trump-family-s-lucrative-business-deals-in-the-gulf_6741163_4.html#
https://www.reuters.com/business/finance/how-trump-family-took-over-crypto-firm-it-raised-hundreds-millions-2025-03-31/
https://www.cbsnews.com/news/donald-trump-jr-washington-power-broker/
https://www.nytimes.com/2025/05/05/us/politics/eric-donald-jr-trump-family-deals.html
The Texas Chainsaw Massacre, 1974, written by Kim Henkel & Tobe Hooper, directed by Tobe Hooper

92 https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/apr/10/donald-trump-ignites-insider-trading-accusations-after-global-tariffs-u-turn
https://www.nytimes.com/2025/04/14/us/politics/marjorie-taylor-greene-bought-stock-trump-tariffs-pause.html
AOC on MTG:

Obama, would have sent the Republicans into screaming fits. As it is under this administration, I doubt there'll be any consequences.

Consequences have been lacking throughout. It can easily seem amazing how this man, the charges against whom include rape, could have politically survived for this long, and make two presidencies. His supporters see strength in that, too, proof that he's the man for the job, proof even that God has sent him. The most obvious fallacy here being that if we bring prophecy into this, it's of course a self-fulfilling one, as it is due to these voters that he was able to survive. In part. Even more important is that the so often belaboured claim that nobody is above the law, as had been uttered every time a case had been decided against him, clearly isn't accurate. Trump still has to pay penalties for most of the things he's been convicted of, and for many more, and by now everyone has given up hope that he ever will.[93] Pick any of the more serious offences, rape, retaining classified material in an unsecure location and in quantities, the attempted shake-down of a foreign leader in order to find or create dirt on a political opponent, fraud, incitement to insurrection. Some of which could easily be labelled as treason. And now imagine any everyday Joe or Jane sitting on the defendant's bench. Imagine yourself. Imagine a black homeless man. Chances are we wouldn't have heard of this person after the first conviction, and it wouldn't have taken months until a conviction, and if it had, this defendant would have spent that time in jail, not being able to afford bail. You got wealth, you can afford not just one but a team of lawyers, and the picture's a very different one. In Trump's case we've learned that lawyers don't even have to know what they're doing particularly well, as long as they manage to stall long enough.
Clearly, the law does *not* apply to everyone in the same way. In the U.S. the prison system is a business, there are people making money from incarcerated others, by keeping them incarcerated. And evidence against you may not be at all as compelling as in the The American People v Donald Trump cases, you may indeed be innocent, and your appointed lawyer might still urge you to strike a plea deal that'll save you a few years as opposed to insisting on your innocence, which can easily result in longer prison terms. Including for alleged non-violent offences.[94]
Not to mention the due process now denied to the plane loads of deportees, denied by a former defendant who has enjoyed due process to a maximum for all his trials.

If there ever had been a chance to see Trump in a jumpsuit fitting his make-up, it's gone. In itself a good reason to become President again, granted. All those cases, gone, and in addition a Supreme Court green light for committing crimes while in office, as long as he can say they related in some way or other to his official duties. Clearly, very clearly, someone's above the law.

And by now, the 2nd Trump term still being young, one can make a good case for such crimes as having already been committed. The President of the United States engaging in unconstitutional acts should count as something criminal, no? Again, relating to high crimes and misdemeanours there are people to argue and debate.

Safe to say that the range of behavioural issues, fraudulent actions and criminal offences points at something we've referred to as a criminal personality in the olden days. It's a bit of a delicate term, and I'm queasy about it. It must be clarified that what is meant here is someone who conditioned

---

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8WwG3aKLdvw

93 We should remind ourselves that the money Trump was ordered to pay to E. Jean Carroll was for defamation, not the sexual assault, even though the judge firmly established the allegation of sexual assault to be a fact.

94 https://innocenceproject.org/coerced-pleas/
Helm et al - Limitations on the Ability to Negotiate Justice: Attorney Perspectives on Guilt, Innocence, and Legal Advice in the Current Plea System (National Institutes of Health):
https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC6368263/pdf/nihms-1500622.pdf

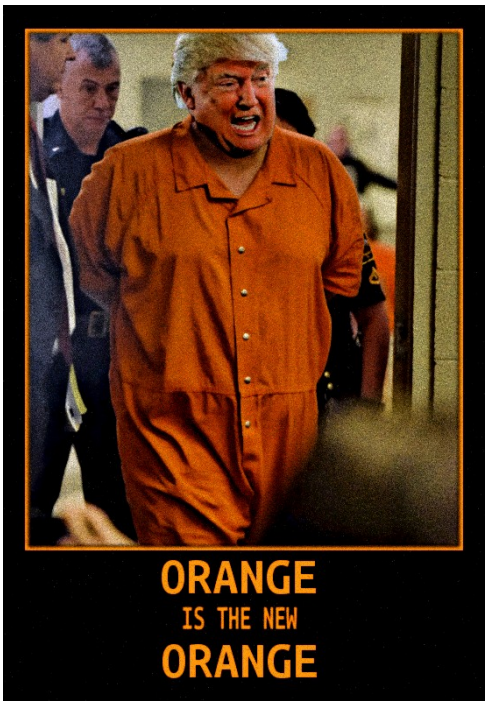
him- or herself to having criminal tendencies. Repeat offenders across the board, which is quite extensive in Trump's case. If you elect a criminal, a crime boss even, into the highest office, you seriously believe he's gonna stop?
But as I said, the thieving mentality is common among the dictators of the world and of history. And we've been used to it with Trump. While it is worrying, it's not even the most worrying thing about him.

Of course the grift goes on, keeping track ain't easy, a few more last-minute links:

Rachel Maddow on more corruption in the Trump administration, the video is about a month old:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q1eABg1ORl4

Trump is about to hold a dinner for investors in his crypto currency:
https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/may/22/trump-crypto-sweepstakes-dinner

And of course there's the little gift from Qatar:
https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/may/21/trump-qatar-plane
Chris Hayes is among those observing how Qatar had wanted to get rid of that plane for quite a long time already:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L6HGEhvd3SM



4. The Bedroom and the Toys

There is a principle in judicial speech that I really like, that of legal sanity. Quite often, when struggling with understanding something it might be a good idea to look at the extremes, in this case the extremes of violent crime, specifically the killing of strangers. One of the reasons why serial killers fascinate so many people is because of this extreme nature that appears to set these

murderers far apart from the rest of us. The strange, the monstrous. I'm afraid the topic is far more accessible.
And this principle I like, it is of the most practical importance, it happens before every trial when the defendant is accused of doing something truly monstrous. We'll try and assess this person's psyche. As deeply as necessary, which for a trial isn't all that deep, it amounts to precisely that question: is the defendant legally sane?
Besides coming to a conclusion over whether the defendant (due to the prevalence of male serial murderers and because there appears to be differences in drives between male and female offenders, I'll refer to males for simplicity's sake) is fit to stand trial, whether he's able to follow court procedures, understands what is happening in the court room, it's about deciding whether he is responsible for his actions, which bears importance for the specifics of the sentence should there be a guilty-verdict – will he be sent to prison or the mental ward?
The subject of the question is simple but heavy, and the reason why I like this term is because it doesn't simply ask whether the defendant is crazy or not, it is split into those two words for a reason. The 'sane' in the term asks about the responsibility: had the defendant been aware that he was doing something wrong? Had the crime been premeditated, planned, and executed according to this planning? Had the defendant taken steps to avoid detection and detention? In other words, had he acted with deliberation in the same manner someone might commit a white collar crime, or had it been the voices?
Spoiler alert - with serial killers it almost never are the voices.
If the answer is Yes to all those questions, the defendant is deemed responsible, and also fit for trial. That's the *sane*-part. The *legally* in the term is a stress. It's an emphasis, the prelude of an elaboration, it's an admission: while we can say with some certainty that the defendant had his capacities together, that he was aware of the wrongfulness of his actions, that he'd been able to plan them, and that he'd been careful to avoid the police, while we can assert with confidence that he had been and is fully responsible for his crimes the same way any other criminal is, we cannot look at these crimes, specifically the details of these murders, and call them sane with a straight face.
Ted Bundy was a handsome, well-liked member of community. A law student, who at one point worked at a help desk, receiving calls from suicidal people, and according to a co-worker he was rather good at it.[95] At another point he volunteered for the campaign of Nelson Rockefeller's presidential campaign, and he became the driver and bodyguard for Republican politician Arthur Fletcher. He was charming, well-behaved, accessible. He also killed over 30 women, some of whom he dumped in the same spot, to return later to have sexual intercourse with the corpses that had meanwhile been laying in the hot Californian sun. We wouldn't exactly call that *sane*. At the same time he'd gone into lengths of preparation with each of his crimes (apart from the murders he committed after escaping from jail), and took great care not to leave too many traces, and the judge, after sentencing him to the electric chair, took the rather ill-advised step to express his regret over Bundy having 'gone down this path' instead of pursuing a career in law, for he was obviously a talented attorney – Bundy had represented himself during the trial.

The principle of *legal sanity* can, in principle, be applied outside this particular extreme of serial homicide. It can in fact be applied to anyone. And whether it is an actual courtroom or the court of every day's judgement, most of us would not end up in the insane asylum, proverbial or not. The feared 'criminally insane' is actually rarer than you might think. For most of us the assessment's conclusion will be 'fully responsible'.
As with the serial killer and other extremes this judgement may quite often warrant a similar prefix, however. Only the very sheltered who managed to preserve a stunning degree of naïvety won't have noticed the one or other rather extraordinary details in some people's behaviour. 'Weird', 'inexplicable', perhaps even 'sick'. 'This guy's got problems.' 'Steven is troubled.'

95 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ted_Bundy
Anne Rule, The Stranger Beside Me, 1980, W.W. Norton & Company, ISBN 978-0-393-05029-5

Well, not only Steven. If you're employed (or employing), and if you have any kind of social life it is highly unlikely that you're not acquainted with at least one person, more likely several, who have 'problems', only you have no idea about those 'problems'. I'm using the word 'problems' and the parentheses quite deliberately, because it signifies a rather troubling demarcation in contemporary psychiatry. Simplified, it is the line between what is accepted as *illness* and what's not. The rule of thumb here, if you can treat it with meds, it's an illness. If not, the person's got 'problems'. Meaning they're supposed to deal with them themselves.
By the way. That would include serial killers and other mass murderers. The cynic in me is tempted to reply, right, seems like they're dealing with it, in their own way.

I should shove this one in between: I'm arguing from the European perspective. While certain care, psychiatric included, isn't just available to everyone here, and psychologists may only be covered by the insurance companies to a degree, meaning there's a certain time limit involved in a number of countries during which the therapy is supposed to work, with the U.S. it often seems that nearly everyone who can afford it has or at some point in their lives had a shrink, and that may often be a psychiatrist. I would still say that everything below counts for the U.S. as well, especially where it's not about the psychiatric profession, but also from the availability perspective.

What is so alarming about the state of psychiatry in this respect is that a huge number, to some extent a shadow number, of people are completely left in the lurch. You're not ill, you're having problems, you need to consult a psychologist. No, I'm sorry, we can't help you finding one.
I don't wish to imply that a certain perception that has most psychologists be quacks and charlatans is an accurate one across the board, but depending on where you are in the world it seems indeed much easier to become a non-clinical psychologist than a psychiatrist. Suffice to say, it can be quite a task to find the right one and land a hit. Which for some people can already be difficult for personal reasons. Plus, your insurance company better cover it.
That's not to say that psychiatrists would be the saviours. There are psychiatrists that shouldn't be let anywhere near any work with people, and in general the field generates an astonishing degree of arrogance, which is partly what led to this strict division between illness and 'problems'.

And rest assured, those 'problems' can be very serious.
We can't even really talk about a spectrum, other than there being good cause to view the whole issue of the human psyche as a scale, or a slide, where the most dramatic and violent extents are the most visible, those that may make headlines, while those at the other end remain largely invisible. But the variety of what emerges as symptoms is staggering.
Another rule of thumb that can be applied here is that a real line can be drawn between the disturbances that are directed at the self and those that will be directed at others. The former is arguably the much more common manifestation. We're talking anything here from the mild form of OCD that has many people perform a double-tap on the light switch, even though from an electrician's perspective that is completely nonsensical, to people cutting themselves, to people pulling out their hair and develop ever more elaborate rituals involving the hair's root sheath, to non-substance addictions. Rituals and manias are the keywords here. Invisible because hidden daily, inescapable routines, little compulsive labyrinths, some of which would indeed cause hospitalisation should they be performed in public, and which would inevitably invoke the impression of something 'sick' you weren't supposed to see. They're not normally performed in public, because the afflicted have them enough under control to choose not to do that – which, would they be a crime, make them 'legally sane'. At the same time they absolutely cannot resist them. Not alone. Not without intensive therapy.

The incredibly rich and colourful pallet of mania, obsessions, rituals, certain extents of some of which run under the term 'perversions' in the textbooks, are time-consuming and isolating, and together with the broad spectrum of anxieties and resulting psychosomatic afflictions they make up

a quite significant portion of the populus. It is hard, perhaps impossible to arrive at a figure, as so many of these ritualistic ‘problems’ are kept a secret. Safe to say, meanwhile, that they don’t come out of nowhere.
One particular ‘sub-genre’, if you will, are the results of trauma, particularly childhood trauma. Respective to the public, trauma is often misunderstood. The in my eyes best way of explaining trauma that covers them all is by saying that trauma means stress. Perpetual stress. Up to 24/7, because it may continue in your sleep. Even when the traumatized experiences what they perceive as a calm moment, it wouldn’t compare to someone not haunted by trauma. Constant stress is unhealthy in a number of ways, and it’s one of the reasons why I call rape not only a sibling to murder, but a slow murder in itself.[96]
While the significance of trauma is to some extent acknowledged and respected in psychiatry, sufferers, particularly those more advanced in age, may still find themselves fending on their own, by means of the same kind of referral. Age will indeed often be the decisive factor. And it is much worse outside psychiatry. At some point you’re expected to have learned to deal with it. Only, says who? Especially if you have to do it on your own. And it may be extremely difficult for the sufferer to face it even with a therapist, which adds more shadows to the number. Plus, the same challenge to find the right one suiting you remains.

Large swaths our society/societies treat the traumatized like abandoned Christmas-puppies. We’re all sympathy when the puppy is still a puppy, appropriately so. But the puppy will grow up. Will become big. Big in itself is an attribute that can get the adult puppy abandoned all over. As an adult human the puppy will become difficult. It’ll be *troubled*. Difficult, troubled people are generally not the most popular. Easy people, people who don’t worry much, are popular. We all have our troubles. You’re an adult, you ought to be able to deal with it.
Problem is, that’s what traumatic abuse does. It’ll make life, later life including, difficult to a degree anyone who makes this demand won’t be able to understand. Many trauma-afflicted will try. Try hard, and try long. Until it simply doesn’t work anymore.

The other way the disturbance can go is by the afflicted directing it at others, and this doesn’t only have to happen by means of direct violence. Violence can mean a number of things that won’t include beatings, kicks, fires started and bullets fired. It also includes things like bullying, general anti-social behaviour, and the lust for making other people’s lives miserable.
Yes. The plot thickens.

As I implied, the external venting, the direction of direct or indirect violence at other people comprises the smaller number of people with ‘problems’. That might seem rather counter-intuitive to some, looking at the numerous reports of shootings, including school shootings, murder, rape, swarming, and what have you, but that’s a statistic easily explained. A murder will make a headline much more reliably than a suicide. Suicides as a regional, perhaps national statistic, especially when amounting to an ‘epidemic’ will be reported on as a whole. Acts of violence, and the more violent and dramatic the quicker, will make headlines. The mass-shooter. The bomber. The serial killer. Meanwhile the countless hidden lives of compulsive, ritual mania will never make a headline, even though the effect on their lives is for the afflicted very dramatic, too.

In the context of this effort people with a tendency to apply violence that isn’t counted as such in the eye of the law are of particular interest. The rather belaboured definition does by all means not mean that we’re only talking lawful acts here, and time and time again we can see aspects overlap here, details familiar to us from certain cases.
Dennis Rader, known as the serial killer BTK, had once been employed in animal control for a short time, and he would frequently catch dogs he knew to not be far from their owners, then approach

96 Specifically a sibling to murder committed with a self-gratifying motive.

the owners and tell them he caught their dogs because they were supposed to be on a leash, and he would euthanise them.[97] He couldn't have thought he'd keep that job for long, behaving like this. The reason for doing it was because he relished seeing people in distress.
I have met *many* Dennis Rader-types who weren't serial killers (at least not to anyone's knowledge) in respect to this aspect. People who liked making life difficult for others because they enjoyed seeing them in distress. Quite often people in roles of limited authorities, quite often involving a uniform. Policemen. Border control. But others, too. As a somewhat disturbing detail, many of those I recall wore moustaches, too.
It's sometimes called passive sadism, but there's nothing passive about it. It's a deliberate act aimed at causing others pain. Where a certain amount of official authority is involved, it makes these acts rather easy. With many it can be assumed that these kind of jobs are serving as a vehicle to begin with. And the more power this position of authority entails, the easier it gets, and the more people will fall victim.

Obvious similarities with a certain someone standing, I'll put a pin in there for now, to focus on what caused me to unfold these elaborations, namely that one aspect that many of the *legally, but only legally sane* have in common, from the self-harmers to the sadists, and which makes for an at once rather dissatisfying but extremely relevant conclusion. In Trump's case what arguably worries me the most is what invariably causes the most puzzlement, but also amusement.

When Robert Bloch published his book 'Psycho' in 1959 he had done something until then unheard of.[98] He'd drawn a connection. He chose a particular one, namely that between a mother and her son. Alfred Hitchcock turned the book into a film later, going a step farther in the deception and made the main character a very handsome, innocent looking young man.[99] But he also got one thing very right.
When Lila Crane investigates the house at the end of the film she first comes across the mother's bedroom (the heart of the house), and then the son's bedroom (the mind). Composer Bernard Herrmann, as always in on it, created the two most connecting tracks for the scenes; as was his tradition he'd name the tracks in the simplest manner of contents, 'The Bedroom' and 'The Toys'. While the mother's bedroom is quite pompously decorated with old-fashioned furniture, the wardrobe filled with her clothes, the son's bedroom is but a small, meagre and rather dark looking chamber. A simple, very small looking bed, a cot rather. And toys. Many toys. Old-fashioned, too, the toys of a little child. Which is at once unsettling. This is supposed to be the room of an adult man, after all.
Anthony Perkins, who played Norman Bates, reported that Hitchcock told him that Norman is the boy-man.[100] That is, it is not merely an unusual amount of boyish traits that have survived in Norman, but the very boy himself. Rather than the mother having taken over, as suggested by the rather nonchalant and self-assured psychiatrist at the very end, it is the boy who determines the adult's life. That latter bit being my interpretation.

When we talk about the 'child in the man' (I'm still focusing on men), we usually refer to playful attributes. We refer to silliness, to youthfulness, perhaps a penchant for games, we refer to pranks. Aside from the more pronounced youthfulness in case of actual children, none of these attributes are

97 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dennis_Rader#
If I'm not mistaken, Rader indeed killed one of these dogs.

98 Robert Bloch, Psycho, 1959, Simon & Schuster

99 Psycho, 1960, written by Joseph Stefano, based on the novel by Robert Bloch, directed by Alfred Hitchcock
Anthony Perkins played Norman Bates, while in the novel Bates is a rather unattractive man and older than Perkins.

100 Hitchcock's 'note' to Tony Perkins had actually been related by Jerry Goldsmith, the composer of the soundtrack for the movie's sequel, 'Psycho II', and his narrative can be found in his composition commentary in the cover-inlet of some of the editions of the soundtrack.

actually the prerogative of children. There are aspects that describe adulthood more astutely, such as the ability to distinguish, the willingness to take responsibility and suchlike. Those in place, and you can engage in as much silly pranks as you like, you won't be less of an adult. To name a person really every child knows, I consider passionate prankster George Clooney an adult.

The *real* child in the man is something altogether different. It is the boy who should no longer *be* there. A remnant that has remained all too powerful. A force of the uncontrolled, dead set on determining the actions of the man. Impatient, unruly, stomping its foot when it doesn't get its way. Something that cannot let go. Something that will carry a grudge, something that will remain vindictive. It is something inherently unhealthy, unpredictable, potentially violent, and very, very dangerous.

And it is something every group of people mentioned in this segment, every individual among these groups, and many more have in common. It is a very common aspect of a huge number of people. Which is what makes it profoundly unsatisfying as an answer. It's not an explanation in itself. It is always an important facet, however. And in some it is more dominant than in others, in some it is more obvious. It always causes havoc. It always causes damage. To the self, or to others.

Just imagine a person in whom this aspect is the perhaps heaviest weighing component to his 'problems', problems that are not problems to him, the way he sees it, just imagine such a man in a position of great power.

We see it now and then, including in people with less power, but with life going nonetheless better for them. We even see it where the problems are without doubt of the more medical sort. Would Kanye West not be this famous, would he not be this rich, I doubt he would have been able to stay off the psych-ward for this long. With insanity, legal or not, it seems to be pretty much like with smack addiction. According to William S. Burroughs, a person can live a long, healthy life as a heroin addict, just as long as the drug is pure enough and supply is guaranteed.[101] Fame and the money that comes with it will keep you off the wacko-ward, as long as both remain in supply. Just as fame and money will pay your attorneys in 200 lawsuits.[102]

There has been no shortage of attempts to analyse Donald Trump. You may remember the slight rumpus when a number of professionals made such an attempt in a joint effort ahead of his first term, to warn about putting such a person into the Oval.[103] There was contention over the question whether it was ethically sound to analyse someone from 'afar', specifically a public figure. Just to get that one out of the way once and for all:
I *assume* (where assumption signifies hope) that with such a high profile subject and in the context of the highest office in the land a personal psych-evaluation, meaning a session with the person in

101 I could not find the exact quote, but here's a CBC interview extract from 1977 in which he inferred something similar:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DnxweVAvE5w

102 Actually, Trump is famous for being reluctant to pay his lawyers – just ask Rudy Giuliani.
A list published by Just Security, published on May 13th, 2025, cites 236 litigation cases since his return to office (these would be only cases filed *against* him):
https://www.justsecurity.org/107087/tracker-litigation-legal-challenges-trump-administration/
Wikipedia cites more than 4000 cases between 1973 and 2016, I assume this includes cases filed by him:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Personal_and_business_legal_affairs_of_Donald_Trump

103 Cited was the Goldwater Rule:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Goldwater_rule#About_Donald_Trump
https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/16/health/analyzing-donald-trump-psychology.html
Forensic psychiatrist Bandy X. Lee edited the 2017 book The Dangerous Case of Donald Trump, Thomas Dunne Books, ISBN 978-1-250-17945-6

question, would be more in-depth, would comprise in fact more than one session. I'd hope the same for psych-evaluations as commissioned by a court in criminal cases where it's about assessing the defendant's fitness to stand trial, their status as either being legally sane or not. And I'm not sure how this is being handled in the United States.
Over here in Europe a psych-evaluation of an ordinary mortal that can be initiated within a broad range of contexts looks like the following. It'll be a single session, lasting between 45 minutes and an actual hour. In regards to the countries where I know how this works it has got to be an *independent* psychiatrist. It cannot be *your* psychiatrist, should you have one. Apparently there's a sense of distrusting your psychiatrist's assured objective judgement, as insulting as this may seem. So it'll be a psychiatrist who has never met you before, who doesn't know you at all, and who will at best know about whatever situation we're talking about from a summary on a sheet of paper. Naturally, you also won't know this psychiatrist at all.
The session will by all definition *not* be friendly. You will be asked about personal details of a sort you might have taken months to get to with your psychiatrist. Heavy stuff. Stuff it's hard for you to talk about. And you're expected to answer. Within this one session. You'll be asked directly, and you better reply. A psych-evaluation of the common sort resembles more an interrogation.
Few people will be able to be honest during such extraction-attempts. Most people will be intimidated, and will already not act as they normally do. And accordingly, these evaluations will not exactly guarantee a reliable, accurate picture. Someone close to me once had to go through no less than five of them within the span of half a year. I was able to read the summaries, with his consent. Five different psychiatrists. Five different diagnoses. But I'm sure they were all given with utmost confidence. After all, they'd been paid good money for it.
I once asked a psychiatrist who didn't put herself on this particular market why she didn't. Her answer? 'Because I consider it unethical.'

Now, I'm not saying that psych-evaluations are useless by default. The above mentioned 'method', for lack of a better word, is in a sense established mass-procedure for way too many people emerging for whom *some* evaluation is deemed necessary. It's more the way this is handled I'm criticising.
And again, I'd hope that a personal, more in-depth evaluation would apply when it's about the U.S. Presidency. You know. The job that gives one the nuclear codes. Which is basically what the clinical professional signing this preliminary diagnosing from a distance asked for. We the shrinks have come to a certain conclusion about the subject, and we strongly advise that a more in-depth evaluation be conducted. We'd have liked to conduct it ourselves, but we weren't allowed to, because for some reason such an evaluation is not a thing where it concerns the U.S. presidency, so we had to do it from afar.
And *why* is it not a thing? Of course there's the regular check-up, including the testing of the President's cognitive abilities. You'll remember. 'Person. Man. Woman. Camera. TV.'[104] I'm once again shocked that I didn't have to look up those words.
But really, why is it not a thing with the person, the man, by all means the woman, whom we entrust the nuclear codes? After all, we make sure that a person about to be hired isn't a lunatic where it concerns less powerful positions. With soldiers, for instance. Mind you, we don't want them to go bonkers and commit atrocities during war time. And isn't the President the Commander in Chief? Doesn't that essentially make him the nation's top soldier?

But of course no analysis of Trump would from a certain point on be all that distant. The man had been on the public couch long before he announced his first candidacy. Not just the American couch. The world's. Therapists might have much bigger problems getting through to their respective patients during a high number of much more personalised sessions. Trump has always been wearing himself on the sleeve in an all too obnoxious manner, to the extent that being predictive about him

104 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LhZyHIZpzoM

wouldn't amount to a party trick. And an analysis can be tested according to what it may predict. In this sense even the attempt of an analysis by someone who is emphatically not a shrink like me has found itself thoroughly vindicated, as none of what we're seeing now, none of what we've been seeing ever since he came down that escalator, has been surprising in the least.

The most persistent diagnosis, using the term both in the professional and broader sense, by clinical psychiatrists and pundits alike, is that of severe narcissism. I wouldn't argue with that. Nor would I argue with notes on less striking, but perhaps significant other features that may or may not play a role for the bigger picture, such as the fact that he doesn't seem to get along with other species of animals (don't be misled by his 'concern' for the billions of birds that he thinks are getting killed every day by wind turbines, think more the mutual disdain between him and that bald eagle, or the fact that he's the only president in a long time without dogs in the White House), his rotten sense of humour or lack thereof, generally amounting to rather sickening schadenfreude (arguably, conservative humour isn't the most successful, but with him we're not even talking conservative, anyway), his poor and barren taste in music (no offence, Village People), his poor taste on the whole, except for things glorifying him (he currently has the White House redecorated with as much gold as possible).
As for other species of animals, they don't seem to be too keen either.[105]
The identification of narcissism is still the most significant of those presented, but for me it doesn't go far enough. The most worrying, the most dangerous aspect is that this 78 yr old man is essentially a child. A boy. An unpredictable, capricious, vindictive boy. And while I can appreciate the jokes made about the numerous more ridiculous manifestations of this, and while everyone should, humour is a potent weapon, an unpredictable, capricious, vindictive boy in the Oval Office is incredibly dangerous.

Those dangers are legion, but of course there's always the top one.
Trump has portrayed himself as a peace-president, which hasn't been supported by his deals and actions.[106] Particularly when it comes to nuclear weapons he has tried to paint the image of the concerned, including by claiming that Biden was bringing the world to the brink of World War III by supporting Ukraine.[107]
This contrasts other outings on behalf of Mr. Trump that can only be called a lot more nonchalant. Three I shall mention here. There's his now infamous question why, 'if we have them, don't we use

105 https://www.youtube.com/shorts/1msEmuS8ynE

106 Trump famously claimed he would end the war in Ukraine on 'day one' while campaigning. The war is still ongoing, and after berating and humiliating the Ukrainian President Zelenskyy in front of the press, and after what can be called a campaign of shake-down and coercion directed at him, Zelenskyy has now agreed to a mineral deal with the U.S. (it is unclear what security guarantees besides U.S. business interests resulting from this deal Ukraine received). Zelenskyy has challenged Putin to meet him in person for ceasefire talks in Turkey: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/may/11/ukraine-ready-meet-russia-only-ceasefire-agreed-zelenskky
Trump had also claimed to end the war in Gaza. A ceasefire had been reached, but ended soon after. Trump openly mused about Gaza as a property project; Netanyahu's government has since implied that it seeks to remove the Palestinian population from Gaza, effectively taking over Gaza:
https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/feb/05/waterfront-property-what-are-trumps-real-estate-interests-in-palestine
https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/may/05/israel-expand-military-operations-gaza

107 https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cdrdmkxy7xmo

them?'[108] Then there is his idea of combating hurricanes with nukes.[109] And then there's one that has sort of drowned amid the waves of the incredible and the facepalm-inducing.
During a long conversation with his buddy Elon Musk the topic of nuclear weapons came up.[110] Musk, himself quite the boy-man, and it is still really *not* meant as a compliment, appears to have quite an unhealthy fascination with the big boom bombs himself. He once proposed, and I'm still in the grey as to how serious he was, to melt the Martian poles by means of nuclear explosions above them to have large quantities of water vapour and carbon dioxide released into the atmosphere and thus heat up the freezing planet, as well as melting a lot of water, an idea that, courtesy basic Mars facts, wouldn't work.[111]
At some point during the conversation with Trump Musk referred to the descriptions of the effects of a nuclear blast as 'actually not so bad', pointing at Hiroshima and Nagasaki as being cities that had been obliterated by atomic bombs, and yet they had rebuilt it, and thousands of people were living there. That it was Musk who made this point with such staggering ignorance must not deflect from Trump not disagreeing with him. And it should worry everyone that his ear is open to this tech giant, this richest man on Earth, a man he regards as a genius, a man who at other times has spoken about the end of the world as if it was around the corner.[112] This ear is attached to the same head that has the mouth asking why 'we' are not using them, since 'we' have them.

There are a million ways of how it can get to a nuclear stand-off between two nations armed with these weapons, and this can quickly be the same for two countries that are now allies or partners in crime. Relationships sour.[113] There had once been a pact between Hitler and Stalin.
Trump has boasted on many occasions about how unpredictable he is, and how this unpredictability gives him a negotiating advantage. But Trump's diplomatic vocabulary is rather - condensed, shall

---

108 https://www.cnbc.com/2016/08/03/trump-asks-why-us-cant-use-nukes-msnbcs-joe-scarborough-reports.html
Donald Trump's nuclear fixation - from the 1980s to now (BBC):
https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-40879868

109 https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2019/aug/26/donald-trump-suggests-nuking-hurricanes-to-stop-them-hitting-america-report
I was surprised to find that the idea wasn't actually new, according to this BBC item which also conveys what the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration thinks about it:
https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-49471093

110 The full conversation between Trump and Musk has been uploaded by the Economic Times:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lfBQoWxQaEM
Do yourself a favour and remember that life is short – the relevant section is at 1:16:38 – 1:17:45

111 https://www.space.com/elon-musk-nuke-mars-terraforming.html
There's also the little problem with the Outer Space Treaty:
https://www.nuclearpolicy.info/news/nuke-mars-elon-not-with-your-outer-space-treaty/

112 https://www.vanityfair.com/news/story/elon-musks-children-ashley-st-clair
And the Guardian's Arwa Mahdawi's take:
https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/apr/19/musk-trump-palestine-katy-perry

113 https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/mar/30/donald-trump-angry-vladimir-putin-ukraine-nbc
https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/apr/26/trump-and-zelenskyy-hold-very-productive-ceasefire-talks-in-rome
Of course relationships can have been sour to begin with. While throwing in these footnotes the world has just been facing another India/Pakistan scare. The thought that there are generations for which this one was the first comes to me, and the question whether this makes it harder or easier for them to understand the gravity of two nuclear-armed nations driving another to the brink. It probably depends on the respective kid.
Here a Today in Focus podcast episode on India's and Pakistan's relationship in the context of the most recent/still not really resolved crisis:
https://www.theguardian.com/news/audio/2025/may/13/back-from-the-brink-india-and-pakistans-uneasy-truce-over-kashmir-podcast

we say. Limited. He employs the same strategies over and over. It is because these strategies are based on the same principles of bullying and intimidation that he was granted dubious short-term successes. And it is precisely the worst strategy in the eventuality of a nuclear stand-off where the greatest danger isn't even intent. It's accident, it's over-reacting, it's *misinterpretation*.[114] Not being readable, being unpredictable is not an asset in such a case. It's an additional threat that makes the worst outcome more likely.

Such dangers and more apply with all dictators, of course, and here there's also the situational danger of the Trump administration completing the process of turning the U.S. into an autocratic state, resulting in the three superpowers on planet Earth being autocratic nations, plus several important others, with the question emerging of how we'd ever come back from that. With all the implications arising. If not a devastating war, then the very much unfolding climate catastrophe, the combating of which will essentially be stopped.

With the U.S. Constitution there's in theory a fail-safe. It's called the 25th Amendment. But this can only be in use when there's someone willing to apply it. Not when the 3 Branches of Government have become unequal and therefore inefficient.

One last word about analysis. Recently an article was published in the Guardian in which the author argued that the more adequate diagnosis of worth regarding Trump wasn't so much narcissism, but solipsism.[115] I don't disagree with the author about Trump being a solipsist, if, like the author, you personalize the term, in fact it fits Trump rather aggressively, but from a clinical point of view this interpretation is less a diagnosis of Trump and more like Trump as a symptom of humanity. We're still *inherently* solipsistic, and it shows in many ways, starting with something as significant as imagining ultimate catastrophe, which we routinely clad in the notion of a 'civilisation-ending event'. With respect, but in the eventuality of a thermonuclear world war or other globally devastating events there's a little more at stake than the fate of one species' budding, so far not quite successful attempt at a civilisation.
There are many more, often quite every day examples of how we still tend to take us and our existence out of the context of life on Earth and the long history of the planet. If anything, this tendency to disregard this context seems to have strengthened as a renaissance lately.[116] If we apply the word solipsism to every massively egoistic and narcissistic individual it may lose potency where it may be needed more, while distinguishing itself not notably from the notion of severe narcissism, because such narcissism will inevitably entail a quantity of solipsism.
Therefore, while not disagreeing with the author's conclusion, I suggest that we reserve the term as describing a tendency as being generated by too many members of our species, even though this is being driven by individuals, but as an effect manifesting itself in large swaths of people.

---

114 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nuclear_close_calls
A while ago I vented my own fears in a piece called The Tepid War Generation (with the 'tepid' referring to the generation):
https://archive.org/details/the-tepid-war-generation

115 John R. MacArthur - Trump isn't a narcissist – he's a solipsist. And it means a few simple things:
https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/feb/08/donald-trump-media-coverage

116 As mentioned earlier, you can find solipsism everywhere, from everyday talk to academia. Just think about the implications of lazy, idiotic questions and statements like 'if a tree falls in the forest and no one's there will it make a sound?' (proof that there is such a thing as a **stupid** question) or 'time is just an illusion, man'; one has the reality of sound as distributed through a medium only existing in our majestic presence, the other finally has existence itself to be our product.
If we try and find the ur-basis for all the bad and evil in the world we might arrive at chauvinism. There are many forms chauvinism can take, misogyny, xenophobia, racism – what chauvinism always needs is the perception of the self as a group to be superior over another, entitling the own group to exploit, enslave, and exile or kill the others. It requires seeing oneself at the centre. Which, to my mind, makes all chauvinism a form of solipsism.

Last-minute links -

All such dangers, including the gravest ones to the world, come with all dictators. In the U.S. they're met in theory with a fail safe, the 25th Amendment to the Constitution. But this will only apply if there *is* anyone who'll apply it, not when the branches of governance have become unequal and therefore ineffective to do so:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Twenty-fifth_Amendment_to_the_United_States_Constitution#Section_3:_President's_declaration_of_inability
Reader's Guide to The Twenty-Fifth Amendment to the United States Constitution by the Yale Law School:
https://law.yale.edu/sites/default/files/area/clinic/document/mn082208_ls_readerguide_interior_final.pdf

The playlist-display in the stead of a town hall was argued by some to have been a conscious demonstration of Trump not having to care. That might even be so - it was still fricking weird:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zWV9CISAVbo

5. The Stories We Tell Ourselves

'This is gold, Mr. Bond. All my life I've been in love with its color, its brilliance, its divine heaviness. I welcome any enterprise that will increase my stock.'[117]

117 Goldfinger, 1964, written by Richard Maibaum & Paul Dehn, based on the novel by Ian Fleming, directed by Guy Hamilton

Reportedly the inspiration for Ian Fleming's Auric Goldfinger was the precious metal magnate Charles W. Engelhard Jr. (platinum, gold and silver).[118] At his zenith Engelhard was obese, liked a life style comparable to that of 'an Indian Rajah', according to the New York Time's Robert Walker in a 1971 article, and liked to drink Coca Cola.[119] He was interested in entering politics, became a candidate in the New Jersey State Senate elections in 1955.
Unlike Trump he didn't have bone spurs, and had served as a bomber pilot with the U.S. Air Force in World War II.
I was recently watching the golf scene in the 1964 film version of 'Goldfinger' and thought that the character, his looks and the acting by Gerd Fröbe felt quite providential. Overweight, check. Obsessed with gold, check. Boorish and clumsy, check. A sadistic touch as revealed in the scene from which the quote above was taken, or the suffocating gold cover of the female victim, check. He even cheats at golf (and at cards). And his hair is orange. Oh, yes. He's also a criminal. I wouldn't be surprised had someone in the audience, when the movie came out, thought, 'honestly, who came up with this villain? Seems a bit much...'

From time to time our fiction gets it eerily right, but the reason for that is that many of our real life villains are rather cartoonish. A cartoonish character is simplistic, and a simplistic character will easily find its match outside the world of fiction, and the reason for *that* is that cartoonish people are simplistic.
If you watch the 1992 film version of 'Howard's End' watch out for James Wilby's portrayal of Charles Wilcox, the rich family's son.[120] He not only feels like the prototype of the spoilt super-wealthy brat born with a golden sauce ladle up his rectum that gave him an inflated ego, he also teeters along the sharp edge of madness. Watch his eyes. Or perhaps it's because cocaine was still freely available back then, because in retrospect he very much seems like the Edwardian version of Donald Trump jr.

The whole Trump family is too much for a film- or small screen script. It's the amount of cliché. It's the whole crime family song. The whole family empire stuff. Just worse. From 'Dallas' to 'Dynasty', from 'The Godfather' to 'The Sopranos' to 'Succession', the writers were trying to script in at least some redeeming features, or even build the whole character structure as something we're supposed to sympathize with. I'd say the Trumps compare more to the Addams Family, if the villains in their story weren't nearly anyone else outside that family, with the Addams providing a much more preferable environment.
It's embarrassing to watch, even if you, somehow, manage to forget that the action takes place in the White House. The trophy wife, who everyone thinks is dreaming herself out of Washington, away from her old, shrivelled husband, and to a tropical beach with a tanned, body-built cocktail mixer, but whose expression might be generally misinterpreted, not so much hiding escape plans but openly displaying boredom, as well as a vague feeling of being misplaced. And why would she wish herself to be some place else, the money and influence she'd married into has just gotten a whole lot richer, despite the Emoluments Clause.[121] The irony could not have been greater during her first

---

Goldfinger, 1959, written by Ian Fleming, published by Jonathan Cape

118 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_W._Engelhard_Jr.

119 https://www.nytimes.com/1971/04/11/archives/a-tough-act-to-follow-rosenthal-a-contrast-to-former-chief-at.html

120 Howard's End, 1992, written by Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, based on the novel by E.M. Forster, directed by James Ivory

121 The last paragraph of section 9 of the Foreign Emoluments Clause is pretty clear:
'No Title of Nobility shall be granted by the United States: And no Person holding any Office of Profit or Trust under them, shall, without the Consent of the Congress, accept of any present, Emolument, Office, or Title, of any kind whatever, from any King, Prince, or foreign State.'
https://usconst.co/p/#a1s9c8

stint as the First Lady when she picked her for the role traditional pet project. It was to be anti-school bullying something something. *If* it was she who'd picked it, it very much smacked of a rather clumsy attempt at smothering the accusations of her husband as being the Bully in Chief, and it kinda teetered out. Poor Melania. One could indeed feel for her if she wasn't so extensively compensated, and if during her rare appearances, the rarest for any First Lady, she wasn't so in on it. Normally one should be dubious about someone being declared guilty by association. Not in this case, though.

The apple did not fall from the tree but got stuck between two upper branches with Trump's two sons, Eric and Don jr. Eric's public appearances may pale in a shade of fading beige compared to his brother, but both have learned all the wrong things from their father. What a pair. Don jr. is actively engaged in deepening his image of a privileged douche, not least with his photographic hunting memorabilia, showing him and his brother squatting and beaming over the carcasses of antelopes, jaguars, warthogs and buffaloes, and with the tail of a freshly killed elephant in his hand as a trophy. Don jr. is also not above killing endangered species.[122] What's the latest? Don jr. wants his own TV show. You wouldn't guess: a wild life show.[123]
Both have apparently been to Matchmaker from Hell, because who could have found better spouses for them who'd complete them so totally. Donald jr.'s wife Kimberly Guilfoyle couldn't have been more ecstatic when becoming her father in law's personal town crier with sheer terrifying voice (seriously, Governor Newsom, I was shocked to learn…).[124] And Eric's wife Janice, beg your pardon, Lara, her own voice haunting the countryside, has recently started her own Trump state media show on Trump's state media channel Fox News.[125] All family.

Spouses of Trump family members have reasons for high hopes when joining, especially financial hopes. Jared Kushner, Ivanka Trump's husband, may not have brokered Middle East peace, but apparently a rather lucrative contract for his private equity firm with the Saudis – worth a whopping $2 billion.[126] For more on Mr. Kushner being a little shady, refer to The Long List.
Which brings us the excerpts about Ivanka (these are all but short snippets). At the start of her father's first presidency she was viewed as, or perhaps rather hoped to be the reasonable voice in the family, including by more reasonable media outlets. Ah. Appearances. She looks like an angel,

---

Which, once again, is currently relevant:
https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/may/11/trump-accept-luxury-plane-gift-qatar

122 https://www.propublica.org/article/trump-inc-podcast-donald-trump-jr-went-to-mongolia-got-special-treatment-from-the-government-and-killed-an-endangered-sheep
https://www.npr.org/2025/02/06/nx-s1-5289000/donald-trump-jr-italy-duck-hunting
There's usually a misrepresentation of what species may *not* count as endangered and are thereby declared game (to my knowledge leopards are not just free for hunting, except specific individuals that have repeatedly killed humans). The argument for hunting to regulate populations of certain species must be weighed within the context of habitat – it's not those other species encroaching on ours, but is on theirs - and where populations threaten the well-being and existence of others we must also think about our role in such a development. Should culling indeed be the solution decided, it should be left to expert hunters, who'd do the job for no other reason. Population control as a last resort and beaming over carcasses for photos and cutting off parts of the animal as trophies don't fit together.

123 https://www.thedailybeast.com/trump-team-told-warner-bros-to-give-don-jr-his-own-nature-show/

124 And I thought Jeanine Pirro was scary:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yo6nKT37JN0

125 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/My_View_with_Lara_Trump
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dr._Teeth_and_the_Electric_Mayhem#Janice

126 https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-68296877

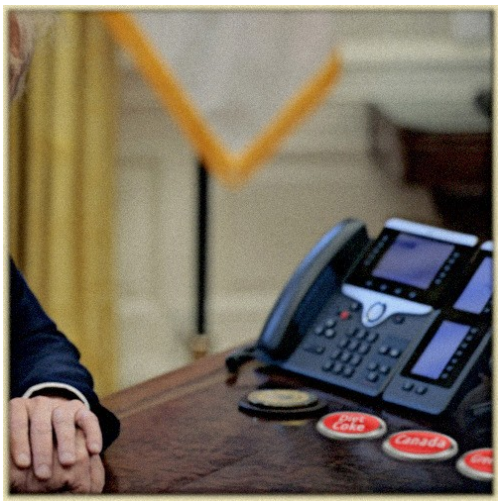
she walks like an angel, she also got more money than an actual angel could make during her best decade in the pit.
Admittedly, some of the projects and foundations she's involved with sound and look rather honourable, e.g. Chai Lifeline, a charity dedicated to children with cancer. Some of her other involvements have gone through a bit of trouble, such as her father's Donald J. Trump Foundation, for which she served as board member, and which gained accusations of misuse of funds.[127] Her father bore the brunt, but she and her brothers were ordered to undergo management training (apparently *that* had been the problem). Not the last time that the family had to face up against AG Letitia James. Ivanka Trump also found herself in conflict of interest, or rather complete absence of conflict in terms of integrity, due to her business ties with China.[128]

Yeah. I'd much rather fraternize with the Addams.[129] But I'd do that, anyway.

From a certain point on you can no longer blame the parents if the kids turn out as corrupt as them. It's a very different kind of damage from that which makes the life of the child difficult. Being spoilt is the worst of all excuses.

When it comes to cartoonish villains we see the same set of patterns with all dictators and wanna-be dictators, of course, and we're getting to those. Meanwhile, the similarities with our image of crime families isn't coincidence, it's confirmation, because the depiction of crime families are based on their realities. The Trumps aren't just *like* a crime family. And who'd wonder why there's so much bad resulting from this?

Naturally, it's also not a coincidence that the whole environment around this congregation bound by blood and marriages will be a suit. Bad players don't merely attract more bad players, they necessitate them. Every villain of stature needs his enablers, after all.



127 https://www.wsj.com/articles/state-judge-orders-trump-to-personally-pay-2-million-to-settle-new-york-suit-11573153976
https://ag.ny.gov/press-release/2019/ag-james-secures-court-order-against-donald-j-trump-trump-children-and-trump

128 https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/ivanka-trumps-brand-expands-business-interests-in-china-and-philippines
https://www.forbes.com/sites/tommybeer/2020/09/22/ivankas-trademark-requests-were-fast-tracked-in-china-after-trump-was-elected/
https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/may/28/ivanka-trump-won-china-trademarks-donald-trump-zte-reversal

129 Addams Family Values, 1993, written by Paul Rudnick, based on characters by Charles Addams, directed by Barry Sonnenfeld. I picked this incarnation, because who could resist this Morticia, and this film because I prefer it over all others (‘*Pastels!*’).

6. The Others (U.S. Edition)

During the first Trump administration the White House was populated by a curious blend of personnel that included staffers who stayed on in their positions despite, shall we say, doubts, in order to minimize damage, people who'd henceforth be called 'the adults in the room', with the hope in the voice of the speaker often being barely concealed.
There were also those who'd come with him, and among those there are some we can grant the benefit of the doubt, people who'd seen something of benefit in a Trump presidency, perhaps naïvely, certainly not something I could identify, and we can never know to what degree that something was a furthering of their careers.
It would be right to characterize John Bolton as a hawk, and he was certainly fully supportive of Team Trump when going into office. But he's also a career politician, and I don't have reason to disbelieve him when he stated how much he disagreed with Trump's North Korea policy, i.e. love affair with Kim; Trump himself has said that he'd disagreed strongly with many of Bolton's advices. The first thing that came to my mind when Bolton was fired, immediately entering the pundit platforms to fire away himself, and soon announcing a tell-all book (I'm really impressed with how quickly some people can write a whole book) was, 'hell hath no fury like a National Security Advisor scorned'.

Becoming a pundit to criticize Trump after having been dismissed would become something of a fashion, and some of these new pundits have survived initiation period to this day. Having been so fervently pro-Trump until he was fired makes it rather hard for me to be fully confident in Anthony Scaramucci's turn of heart having indeed been genuinely based on ethics, and the same goes for gentlemen like Ty Cobb and Gary Cohn. Generally I find that ex-Trumpers appearing on CNN and MSNBC have little more to contribute than what one could muster from listening to other commentators on the same panel.
For me one stood out in this respect during her short stint as public Trump critic, having appeared on numerous channels, including the two mentioned above, meaning she had been accepted onto panels, and that is Omarosa Manigault Newman.

Mrs. Manigault is one of those personalities reminding us just how weird the American political landscape can be personnel-wise (by now the Republican side of the House of Representatives has made a dubious virtue out of it), and how weird their political trajectory. Manigault had actually started out as a Democrat. And a 'contestant' on 'Celebrity Apprentice'. Initially she was all behind Hilary Clinton. What changed was arguably Trump offering his old apprentice the role as director of African-American outreach, the whole Blacks for Trump-thing (you know. Trump loves *his* African Americans). This would eventually morph into the title of communications director for the Office of Public Liaison during Trump's first presidency.
By then Manigault identified herself as Republican and specifically 'Trumplican'.[130] There's a list of oddities everyone can dig up for themselves, what stood out for me above anything else was a statement she'd made on Frontline:

> *'Every critic, every detractor, will have to bow down to President Trump. It's everyone who's ever doubted Donald, whoever disagreed, whoever challenged him. It is the revenge to*

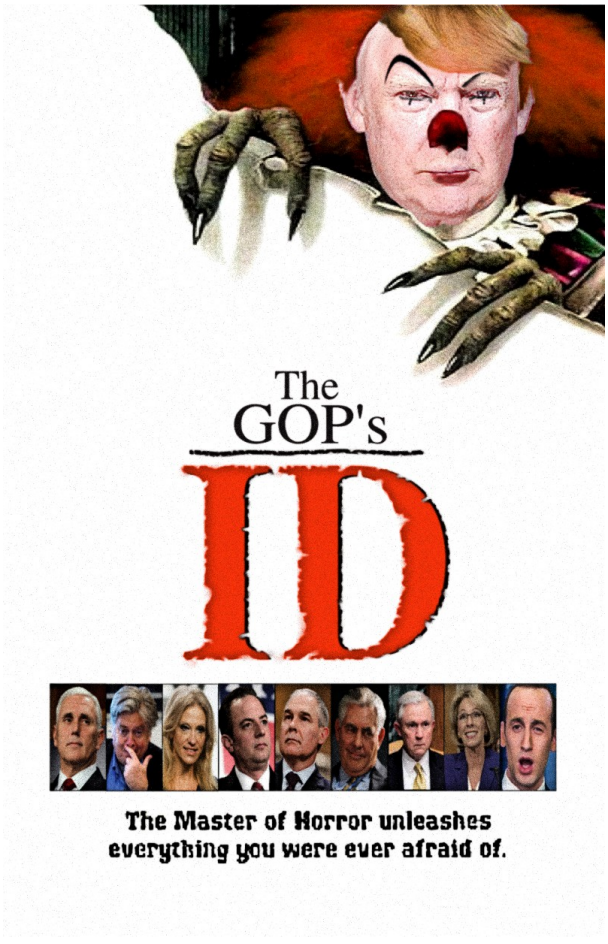
130 https://web.archive.org/web/20170311053454/http://www.washingtonexaminer.com/why-omarosa-abandoned-democrats-to-become-a-trumplican/article/2610932

become the most powerful man in the universe.'[131]

Again, this was made before she became a Trump critic, and both the wording and the exuberance of their delivery, the tone of which which could be expected from the likes of Stephen Miller, made it clear that it was something she absolutely welcomed.
Of course you can argue that for his second term Trump has made exactly this his program, and I don't see Mrs. Manigault as an oracle, so it would seem certain things had been discussed already then.

You don't come back from these words to successfully sell yourself as a born-again Trump critic with lots of insight – and of course complete with tell-all book, written in record time. Not only because her bombastic enthusiasm promoted Trump to being the President of All Existence the outburst/threat at once disqualified her from becoming a later contributor. And yet. Initially even the sober networks welcomed her. Before it dawned on them.

So far not many of the staff in Trump's cabinet have been shuffled about or even removed, unlike during the first round. Once his 'best people' had been announced in their roles at the beginning of his first term I was triggered into making this picture:



Of the nine unleashed only three remained soon after. More that weren't pictured would be fired, among them some of those 'adults' who'd remained to keep things in as much check as they could.

131 Oddly, I couldn't find a video of the PBS Frontline interview with her, only the transcript: https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/the-frontline-interview-omarosa-manigault/

Needless to say, this time there are no such adults, and the staff consists of many who could spout Mrs. Manigault's words quite openly now, beginning with the individual who tends to speak in the same manner on a general basis.
If we're talking about bad while moving into the political circle around Mr. Trump, if we're talking something approaching outright evil, even, we cannot avoid Stephen Miller. Appearances might not always be as things are. Stress on *might.* Sometimes they so are.

Every time I expose myself to listening to Mr. Miller I get this feeling of intense unease, comparable to the urge of taking a shower. Every time the phrase Wannabe Goebbels comes to mind. Not only is his output filled with despise for the lesser fortunate, for anyone he deems not fit to be an American, it appears to be imbued with a gleeful anticipation of what not only should be done to 'illegal' immigrants, not yet convicted defendants and political enemies, but in his mind no doubt soon *will* be done.
What to expect from someone who once, as a student, defended his right to drop his trash by demanding the janitors pick it up for him, since that's what they received their low pay for.[132]
What to expect from someone who's mentor has been David Joel Horowitz.
What to expect from someone who's other mentor had – allegedly and convincingly so – been Richard Spencer, *the* Richard Spencer, the neo-Nazi and inventor of the term 'alt-right'.

Little Stephen had wanted to go into politics from early on. And had been on the far right from just as early on, citing books by the NRA's Wayne LaPierre and Rush Limbaugh as major influences. And he'd been quite the pest for as long, chiding Latino students at Duke University where he studied political sciences for not speaking English – *only*.
He made his ascent by working for Tea Party-Michelle Bachmann and later the to be Trump-AG Jeff Sessions, also working closely with Breitbart News and becoming closely acquainted with Steve Bannon. Miller's focus was intensely on immigration throughout. He joined Team Trump as a speech writer, soon becoming a rally speaker, became member of the transition team after Trump's election, and then Senior Advisor to the President.
And he'd always turn to his pet-peeve, immigration. Would become co-author of the family-separation policy.[133] Much of Trump's immigration ideas turned actions have been the brain-children of the figure who'd once refused to pick up his trash because in his world the janitor was given a low salary to do it for him.

Miller would then turn out instrumental in the attempt to overturn Biden's 2020 election. None of it was particularly concealed. He went on Fox and actually mentioned plans to send 'alternative electors' to Congress in an attempt to nullify Biden's victory.[134] Such fake electors soon turned out to be a reality, which implicates Miller as having been a co-conspirator in a crime.
Miller also contributed to the speech Trump gave at the January 6th rally which was the precursor and, it's very hard to argue against this, green light to the storming of the Capitol.

That Stephen Miller would be the one person featuring prominently in *both* of Trump's administrations, never to be in any danger of getting fired, shouldn't surprise. And it should be telling.

---

132 Stephen Miller, high school speech excerpt:
https://www.instagram.com/reel/DIUi1j0sbXo/

133 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trump_administration_family_separation_policy

134 https://www.marketwatch.com/story/trump-adviser-continues-to-push-for-alternate-slate-of-electors-as-electoral-college-members-gather-to-lock-in-biden-win-11607969100
It has actually become a feature of the Republicans to go on TV and announce unconstitutional and illegal plans.

When over 900 e-mails Miller had sent to Breitbart formed an exposé of his far-right, white nationalist views, White House Press Secretary Stephanie Grisham called the leaker of the e-mails, the Southern Poverty Law Center which had acquired them, the smearing culprit.[135]
Which is as good as any moment to reflect on a little helpless routine on behalf of these folks, namely the hope that by loudly denouncing the leaker the public focus will shift away from the content. Most hilarious it becomes when, as in Pete Hegseth's and Mike Waltz' case, the leakers are actually the persons whose information was leaked themselves.[136]
The Miller exposé became the basis for 80 members of Congress (all Democrats) to call for Miller's resignation, and for Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez to start a petition aiming for the same that reached over 20 000 signatures by the middle of the same month.[137]
Miller's position was never in any danger. You will recall, according to Trump there are 'good people on both sides'.

Miller is now Deputy Chief of Staff and Homeland Security Advisor. His dream come true. I wouldn't even imagine his dream to have been to become President himself. Miller is an enabler. A follower who needs a figure to praise, and to demand praise for. As that he's exactly where he'd want to be, *and* he's in a position to enact all the cruelty he can think of on his enemy-group of choice, immigrants.
If your impression of Trump is that of all choices being bad and evil, then the same impression must go for Miller. In fact he's giving them shape, in speeches and in policies. He's on good terms with Elon Musk, he liaised with the big tech entrepreneurs who appeared at Trump's second inauguration as his willing pet poodles, has been instrumental in the Trump administration's attack on higher education, and he's one of the authors of Trump's strategy of 'flooding the zone' to just disorientate and overwhelm critics and opponents with a flurry of executive orders and irrational public statements, has co-authored a number of these executive orders, including the attempt on ending Birthright Citizenship, which marks one the administration's attacks on the Constitution itself.

Charming.

I won't spend as much time on the whole cabinet, already for the sake of my own sanity, but a few should have a dishonourable mention, and we shall not restrict ourselves to cabinet members alone, only mostly, to save time. You can divide anything into categories if you set your mind to it, and here it might even be easy.
There's the shifters who appear to have completely changed ideas, ideology, sides. Even in retrospect it is not entirely clear to me to what extent Tulsi Gabbard has really done that. At least the switch has been open and complete, not feeling like we were watching a Manchurian candidate as with Joe Manchin.
Marco Rubio also falls into this category of variation on the same sentence, 'these are my principles, and if you don't like them…, well, I have others', and he also segues into the neighbour slot of the spineless leaf, which he occupies along with Lindsey Graham.[138] I wouldn't be surprised

135 https://www.splcenter.org/resources/hatewatch/stephen-millers-affinity-white-nationalism-revealed-leaked-emails/ Mrs. Grisham would also proceed to becoming a TV pundit after her tenure. To her credit, she was the first to resign after January 6th and testified at the January 6th Committee. Later she moved to support Kamala Harris, explaining the absence of press statements later in her tenure, stating that 'unlike my boss, I never wanted to stand at that podium and lie.' https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/2024-election/former-trump-press-secretary-stephanie-grisham-endorses-harris-convent-rcna167476

136 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_government_group_chat_leaks

137 https://www.huffpost.com/entry/stephen-miller-resign-70-congressmembers-say_n_5dcdffdde4b01f982eff2a24 https://act.ocasiocortez.com/signup/stephen_miller/

138 *'These are my principles, and if you don't like them…, well, I have others.'* - Groucho Marx

to find a stripe of duct tape on Senator Graham's bathroom mirror, the exact height where his eyes would appear when shaving. Within the same week he'd gone from praising President Zelenskyy in his face to praising Trump for humiliating Zelenskyy and asking for Zelenskyy's resignation.[139] Mark well the words of Mikhail Bulgakov, Senator, incidentally a son of Kyiv, who named cowardice as being the worst of vices.[140]

Then there's the frat-boy camp. Given that the likes of Gaetz, Boebert and Taylor Greene were allowed into the House (with a little help), for what appears to be the pronounced purpose of spreading nothing but chaos and disruption (correct me if I'm wrong, but don't House members also have to swear an oath? What am I saying, ridiculous, as if they'd care…), and, as it seems, with impunity, it's only due to Mr. Gaetz having behaved too disgustingly even for his Republican colleagues that he hasn't ended up with a cabinet post.
Instead Trump picked someone just like him from the TV to head the U.S. military. What a character. And completely lacking any. Here, though, a major difference comparing to Trump's first round shows. The lightning dropping and replacing of personnel that had raged through the White House during the first Trump administration is not being repeated. Trump has learned that he simply doesn't have to do it. No one in this cabinet who'd even urge him. The one switch after Signalgate was to remove Mike Waltz as National Security Advisor, but only to make him U.N. Ambassador. Because what damage can he cause there. Meanwhile he sticks with Hegseth, even after an even grosser violation on his behalf was revealed in the same story. Not to mention the resistance (and rivalry) inside the Pentagon against this plainly most incompetent choice of Defense Secretary since…, no, sorry, can't think of anyone.[141]

The ridiculous is always part of the bad, but it's not really inducing laughter as much as head-shaking and disbelief, or rather an impulse to refuse belief. Different from Pete Hegseth, the current U.S. AG had at least a career in her trade, though it hardly seems to make any difference. Having a legal background might not make you a constitutional scholar – though especially higher up the judicial ladder it damn right ought to – but at least you should know the letters of the law and due process, the right to a free hearing and the principle of *innocent until proven guilty* are not only constitutional guarantees for all citizens of the United States, they're indeed granted to all *people* (verbatim: 'persons'), citizens or not.[142] Likewise AG Pam Bondi should know what's not allowed, for example lying. The Attorney General is after all the country's highest cop, and declaring individuals guilty without exhausting your investigative tools, not to mention recognizing the

---

139 MSNBC short playing Senator Graham's double-take one after the other:
https://www.youtube.com/shorts/e02JS8Bq_1Y

140 Bulgakov lets his character Voland speak words to the effect:
Mikhail Bulgakov, The Master and Margarita, 1940, first published in serial form 1966, as single volume 1967, in uncensored length in the Soviet Union in 1973; Penguin paperback ISBN 0-14-118014-5
In the context of Senator Graham's flipping, one can't help recalling Zelenskyy putting a video out at the start of the war, reassuring the Ukrainian people of his presence, staying on, while Russian troops were closing in on Kyiv and would have no doubt killed him had they succeeded invading the capital. Compared to that, what does Senator Graham thinks he has to fear?

141 https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/apr/21/hegseth-second-signal-chat-pentagon
https://www.politico.com/news/2025/04/22/pentagon-infighting-hegseth-fired-officials-00302709

142 5th Amendment:
'No person shall ... be deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law.'
14th Amendment:
'... nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law.'
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Due_Process_Clause#

investigative stage as only being the prelude to a trial, is being a corrupt cop in front of the eyes of the nation, and world.

There's a category of the providers, the pavers, who didn't keep to the shadows but made it into the White House. In Howard Lutnik, a financier of Trump's, much of Trump's compulsion for a massive tariff assault on the world has been mirrored, which for Trump was a good reason to make him Secretary of Commerce. Lutnik also mentally sponsored Robert F. Kennedy jr. in everything vaccine-autism crazy.
Russel Vought was clearly another 'maker' in the run-up to the election, and we can see much of his ideology in action now. A Christian nationalist, full of contempt for critical race theory, and one of the brains behind the Heritage Foundation's Project 2025, initially dismissed by Trump as something he didn't know about, but surprise, surprise.
Veep Vance appears more made than maker, a poor man's Golem from Peter Thiel's mud factory, and what do you expect from a protege of one of the vilest individuals on planet Earth.[143] In Vance, too, the ludicrous and ridiculous meets the plain bad.

Which leads us to the openly crazy.
Once again I should stress that I choose my words with care, including the derogations. 'He's a paranoid schizophrenic,' the Batman tells Harvey Dent, 'the kind of mind the Joker attracts. What do you expect to learn from him?'[144]
Though the current cabinet members that are outright and visibly la-la do (probably) not qualify for the diagnosis of a psychotic illness and are thus subject to the *legally sane*-clause, too, they very clearly cross what one could call the Marjorie-border. And what can the kids learn from them?

From Kristi Noem, forever infamous for shooting a dog for not behaving the way she wanted, and then a goat for – also not behaving the way she wanted *(?)*, they can learn that whatever can be turned into a photo-op *should* be turned into a photo-op, just like master Donald did it, taking the quote 'the only thing worse than being talked about is *not* being talked about' to an extreme that would make Oscar Wilde indeed wish he hadn't said that.[145] Here she is, in yet another cosplay outfit, posing in front of a cage filled with bunk beds up to under the ceiling and those and what little space remains with the unprocessed accused sent to El Salvador's CECOT, as if she was the NRA's and ICE's playmate of the month, with those sent by her administration watching on with hollow eyes – an image that at once stirs very uncomfortable feelings linking to equally uncomfortable similar photographs taken after the defeat of Nazi-Germany.[146]
It doesn't help that her eyes look crazy, too.
We often ask whether the stupid know they're stupid. The answer is no, they don't. 'Being dead is like being stupid,' says Ricky Gervais. 'It's only painful for others.'[147] We may also wonder if the

143 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter_Thiel
Thiel's dream-escape-the-apocalypse compound has met with resistance by it's supposed host nation New Zealand: https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2022/aug/18/peter-thiel-refused-consent-for-sprawling-lodge-in-new-zealand-local-council
For more on why billionaires seek to buy properties on remote islands you may want to consult Douglas Rushkoff: Douglas Rushkoff, Survival of the Richest - Escape Fantasies of the Tech Billionaires, 2022, Scribe, ISBN 978-0-393-88106-6
https://rushkoff.com/books/survival-of-the-richest-escape-fantasies-of-the-tech-billionaires/

144 The Dark Knight, 2008, written by Jonathan & Christopher Nolan, directed by Christopher Nolan

145 https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/jun/02/trump-washington-walk-to-the-church-photo-op
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UxXW6tfl2Y0

146 https://www.vanityfair.com/news/story/kristi-noem-el-salvador-prison-photo-op-new-low?srsltid=AfmBOoraB5WpaL9e23TSYd-1rU9jNlTbmOmNp5wSYGSeboVPDeJF_WFO

147 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l4chjruML5A

truly wicked know they're evil. If they see themselves as that, and if not, how do they define evil, if they ever do. Inconclusive. In context of the Gervais-quote likewise, though.

And what can the children learn from the current U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services? Only two things. One is that this brain worm of his has really done the kind of job one would expect from a brain worm. The other is that the end must indeed be nigh.
Let's repeat it together: Robert F. Kennedy jr. is Secretary of Health and Human Services.
Yes. *The* Robert F. Kennedy jr.
If you've just returned from a holiday around Saturn, just pick up the papers. Browse the news outlets. And marvel. Here I'd like to focus on something that seems to have retreated behind the avalanche of flabbergast this man generates like a pyroclastic surge that doesn't discriminate against directions, and that seems to be flatulated by a volcano emitting only hydrogen sulfide. For the children we can turn it into a limerick-challenge: 'Measles follow Bobby where he goes…'

Kennedy went to Samoa a month before the 2019 measles outbreak, joining anti-vaccine campaigners Taylor Winterstein and Edwin Tamanese in heavily lobbying against the MMR vaccine used to inoculate against the virus, including in discussion with then-Prime Minister Tuila'epa Sa'ilele. As a result vaccine-scepticism was high among local Samoans, and the result was disastrous: 83 deaths, mostly children. Of the first 70 dead, 61 had been four or younger when they died. Just how preventable this had been shows in the spread of the outbreak – across the whole Pacific region, reaching New Zealand and the Philippines. Only on Samoa there'd been deaths.[148]

There are always loopholes. And there's this extremely ill-advised 'respect' for 'alternative medicine', for quackery, frankly. Too much credence is still given to the 'sceptics' doubting the single most powerful weapon we have against microbic pathogens – scepticism, too, has to be informed – and it propagates even beyond the sympathizers as fear, the fear of being perceived as 'intolerant' or 'biased', the fear of losing the votes of these lunatics.
To my mind Measles-Bobby, ignoring all the laughs his craziness has earned him, all the fascination with his grotesque appearances, to my mind he should be prosecuted for what happened in Samoa, the charge to be *at least* manslaughter. As the legal term goes. Even if most of the victims of his campaign had no chance to grow into men and women, to perhaps have the capacity of choosing for themselves. Choosing life over the obliteration of their existence.

Finally there's Elon Musk. Not part of this cabinet. Not member of the government at all. And yet doing it all the same.
I've lost a lot of words about Mr. Musk in my piece on the ethical dilemmas the space agencies are facing (it logically follows).[149] And more than you need has been said by others, e.g. Rachel Maddow and Congresswoman Crockett.[150] He's now about to leave DOGE behind, to 'take care of his failing company, Tesla' – good luck, since he's the reason nobody wants to buy Tesla vehicles anymore. Fighting fire with fire doesn't tend to work the way you want it inside a building, but you go ahead, boy.
And you can hear the collective sigh of relief. Finally this bullshit that has already damaged and destroyed countless careers and the agencies they'd been made in, in a reckless process marked by

---

148 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2019_Samoa_measles_outbreak
https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/nov/26/rfk-jr-samoa-visit-measles-outbreak-vaccines

149 →63

150 Congresswoman Jasmine Crockett on Jimmy Kimmel; the section about Musk begins at 02:20:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Eh1dnPSqJsA&t=180s

goofs and mistakes, errors in basic math, and the for Musk customary embarrassing stunts, is over. Right?

Or perhaps it has gone as planned.
One of the things Musk's DOGE team of brats has done at each of the agencies they 'visited', speak invaded, was to collect massive amounts of data. Data on Americans.
In fact, they seemed suspiciously unfazed by the mistakes they made, certainly not touched enough to actually correct them. One could almost get the impression they weren't all that interested in effectively cutting costs, and doing it in any feasible and responsible manner. But they were very keen on accessing data. And the question should have been asked:
why would you send a bunch of quasi-teenage tech savvies to do what would have essentially been an accountant's job?
The suspicions began to bubble up pretty late in the game.[151]

There are key-elements to consolidating power in every dictatorship. Control of the military and the police force. Control over the media. And, where possible, to whatever degree possible, to allow Big Brother to keep watch indeed.
Access to all the data all such agencies have collected on really every citizen and non-citizen? A dictator's dream. To go after enemies, to go after critics, to go after dissidents. To have an intelligence apparatus purely dedicated to *you*.

Sounds too 'Nineteen Eighty-Four'? Sounds paranoid? Sounds like the sort of conspiracy theory you're used to from the guy at the corner, the one with the sign?
The scary thing is that this makes a hell of a lot more sense than Musk's brat brigade just going in to wreck and break.
And Orwell's novel was a warning. Not so much about things to come, but things known about existing villains.

151 Rachel Maddow on DOGE data collection:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-vtJRpu4XUw&t=1s

7. The Other Others (Join the Club)

Speaking of Bond villains. That is, of characters who, out of profit-greed, out of an unhinged ideology, out of sheer nastiness, out of craziness, or out of all of this combined, are set on causing mass fatalities and mass disruption.
Despite Trump's best/worst efforts, the single individual who arguably caused and still causes the most damage, on a regional and a global scale, is Vladimir Putin. His lair being the Kremlin, he otherwise ticks off all the characteristics of a super-villain. Powerful not only politically due to the tyrant's iron hand, but also thanks to a rich reservoir of resources, well connected with other villains, these relationships of which he takes advantage of in numerous ways, e.g. as military- and commerce alliances and to maintain influence over regions, determined to realise his grand agendas, to large parts dangerously delusional ones, while meanwhile enriching himself, his cronies and his henchmen on the expenses of his own people and the people of other nations, in a position of absolute authority that won't permit the slightest dissent, and isolated by this very power, this very same ego-boosting power, and as a result paranoid. A murderer who began his murdering business before he acquired the presidency, and who has continued to murder, including human targets across borders in other, sovereign nations, as well as political enemies in Russian streets and Russian penal centres where he'd put them, and who is suppressing free speech, free media and a free choice of his people to live the lives they want to live. And who has waged and is waging war on countries he has decided should be part of his, or at least under his direct influence, targeting civilians in the process, and risking unseen catastrophe by seizing and not protecting nuclear power stations.[152] Not to mention that he raises the possibility of a nuclear confrontation with much of the rest of the world and thus endangers the habitability of the entire planet.
Naturally Trump loves him.

Trump loves them all. While he lambastes traditional strong U.S. allies and attempts to punish them for nothing with completely moronic tariffs, he praises human rights-abusing, environment-raping tyrants all across the globe and cosies up to them. Love letters to and from Pyongyang. A soccer ball from Putin. Warm embraces with Orbán. And recently a friendly chat over their mutual benefit derived from denying human beings their basic rights, without granting them due process, with Bukele. Even China's Xi, somewhere Trump's tariffs on China must entail a bit of a personal conflict in him since he clearly respects Xi for his brutal crack-down on dissenters.
One would think that just *liking* these guys is a dead give-away. You admire someone, you probably aspire to be more like them.

Anne Applebaum wrote a book titled 'Autocracy Inc. - The Dictators Who Want to Run the World'.[153] Shamefully I still have to acquire and read it, until then I have to consume interviews with her in which she outlines her point. She observes how autocracies across the globe that on the surface are divided by substantial ideological differences have come to act as collaborators to push those agendas they do agree upon, and which are without exception profoundly undemocratic, and

152 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zaporizhzhia_Nuclear_Power_Plant
https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/feb/14/russian-drone-detonates-on-chornobyl-nuclear-plant-containment-shell
https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/may/07/russian-drone-strike-caused-tens-of-millions-worth-of-damage-to-chornobyl

153 Anne Applebaum, Autocracy, Inc.: The Dictators Who Want to Run the World, 2024, Doubleday, ISBN 978-0-385-54993-6

doing so respective to their regions, but also extending into others. A League of Super-villains working on dividing the world map among another.
It doesn't require much brain work to conclude that so much love for the brutes and so much thrown at and in the way of their democratic foes that can only serve and delight the brutes very clearly implies Trump's desire behind this allocation of respective support and boycott – he wants to join this club.

Some might argue that he already has. In the very least he's on his best way there, in the process of completing the transformation of the economically and militarily most powerful nation on the globe into an autocracy, and absolving his entry exam, his initiation into this ghastly cult of obscene misanthropy.
And he has so much in common with them. A complete lack of care for and about the planet's environment and the terrestrial inhabitants' environmental future that has long crossed the line into disdain, a preference for brutally dashing demonstrations (think of the image of Trump holding up a bible for a photo op after having the area cleared of demonstrators by means of tear gas), generally 'negotiating' by bullying and coercing, the appearance of unpredictability, the scapegoating of minorities, even the infantile fascination with costly military parades in their honour.[154] And of course the contempt for those who're less fortunate.

There is, meanwhile, a parallel-running other set of similarities, largely also represented by their cabinet picks, as we've seen: all the dictators, past and present, also have something clownesque, something utterly ridiculous about them. Think of Mussolini. Hitler. Place them, as Ernst Lubitsch so delightfully did with Hitler, alone in the streets, with all their rooster-chest bulging posture, and you can't do anything but laugh.[155]
Outside 'To Be Or Not To Be' it's no laughing matter, of course. Or it is, because like Lubitsch one even has to laugh Death in the face, and tyrants and their henchmen. The late show hosts and other comedians in the U.S. are braver than they might seem to you. All of them also agree over the professional comedic angle, as they're often told by people that they surely must relish about the material of plenty in the Trump era. No, they say, they do not relish, for once it can be rather hard to find this angle because it has to work better than the often already utterly ridiculous material. And then also because they're human beings, and they know what the incompetence, the cruelty, the *bad* means for so many people.

This is yet another sinister aspect to the dictator. That so much suffering is being caused by one ludicrous, absurd fool, with the help of more fools, eager sycophants with lust for their own power, as well as egoistic, egocentric rich parties with an interest. None of the latter type which are geniuses either. Today I watched Democratic Congresswoman Jasmine Crockett on Kimmel, and she put in plain words what other with smaller or no platforms have been saying for long, myself included, about Elon Musk: ''Yes, he knows how to hire smart people, but don't conflate that and believe that he is the genius, 'coz he ain't.'[156]
The fact that those smart people, at SpaceX, say, go along with the false impression, be it due to inescapable clauses that keep him secure in his role as CEO or to a cult mentality, doesn't make it better. By and by SpaceX is becoming just as hated as Tesla. Which is a PR problem not only for SpaceX, but for NASA and ESA, perhaps to a certain degree also to other countries' space programs when they want their astronauts delivered to the ISS. And that's potentially worse than just the people getting annoyed and irritated with the concept of a space program. Right now there are desperate campaigns running to save NASA from devastating cuts that would end many of the

154 https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/may/16/army-anniversary-parade-trump

155 To Be or Not to Be, 1942, written by Edwin Justus Mayer, directed by Ernst Lubitsch

156 Crockett on Kimmel: see →150

ongoing missions (including, potentially, the two rovers on Mars) and with certainty many upcoming missions, not to mention the for our assessment of and combat against the climate catastrophe so important Earth Science division. Conflation is the word. Many of the public might ask themselves, 'why *would* I support NASA? It's using Musk's rockets.'

Musk himself is not a serious person. It's a phrase that has won traction in U.S. politics in recent years. Used mainly about staff in the Trump administration, both terms. Not serious in their jobs, taking the responsibilities not seriously, taking their oath not seriously, but also not serious as a person, can't be taken seriously, and of course, you're not frikkin' serious, are you?
Musk, however, isn't so much a clown as he's simply embarrassing besides being damaging. Awkward, and immensely awkward to watch. Painful. 'Chainsa-aw!'[157] It's to be assumed that he hasn't as much changed as he's just revealed himself (not unlike Putin), once opportunity showed. He's been a fraudster for long – no, he's *not* Tesla's co-founder, even though on paper he appears as that – he's just as vindictive as Trump, and his 'concerns' for the habitability of Earth had been nothing but a front.

Like every ridiculous person, the tyrants of this world are extremely thin-skinned. It'd be an understatement to say that Trump is no exception, he ticks that field clearly with one of his black markers. He ticks really all fields, already when it's about the clownesque, including the make-up, the hair. Consequently the world is filled with all kinds of effigies he cannot and should not feel flattered by, from the die-hard Trump-baby blimp to cartoons to a myriad of memes. I suppose it won't be of much help to his tender feelings that every dictator and dictator-aspirant had to suffer those, just as virtually anyone else in public life, only most of the latter kind are able to deal with what comes with the territory in a much more mature manner. Trump recently threw a tantrum over what was supposed to be a serious portrait of him, just because he didn't like it. To be fair, I don't think it represented him well either. It was much too friendly.[158]
No, Trump wants his avatars and effigies to be heroic. Emitting the impression of strength, of power. Of potency. I cannot help thinking that he probably dreams of a massive bronze stature of himself, of towering height. More often than not his efforts to have those generated end up in involuntary humour, though. Like his virtual trading cards.[159] Whoever designed them must have either been steeped so deep in the Trump cult that it oozed out of their ears, or that person has quietly emigrated. Of course nothing trumps the mugshot. Featuring heavy on actual MAGA mugs, T-shirts and what have you, sold by Trump for an inflated price, but with a lot of pride on his behalf and that of the MAGA crowd, it features the slogan 'Never Surrender'. With the photo taken at Fulton County Jail, Atlanta, after Trump had literally surrendered to charges brought against him.[160]

Humour on the far right mostly has a hard time to get off the ground. If ever. Extremist humour broadly has. What counts as humour over there usually has a victim which can be gleefully shredded, a real victim. There's glee in successful humour, too, but the kicking is generally directed upward, or at people who're really asking for it. Far right glee kicks downward, at people who're different, or at people it denounces as enemies. Extremism always needs enemies, and if there aren't any they can easily be produced.

---

157 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nkMVb0RNptA
The person behind him on the right, who gifted Musk this wonderful present, is Javier Milei, himself a fresh member of the Autocracy Club

158 https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/mar/24/trump-colorado-portrait-painting

159 https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/article/2024/aug/27/trump-debate-suit-fundraising

160 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mug_shot_of_Donald_Trump

Trump's 'humour', for lack of a better word, is equally rotten, at worst sadistic and at best deflated before it has even fully egressed from his mouth. And it's always cheap. A familiar factor. Bukele must have thought himself real funny when posting those tweets about a man he knows he's keeping in detention without any grounds – it's a hallmark of dysfunctional humour that, no matter how unfunny and disgusting, you'll always see the intention to be funny. The labour.

The combination of princess-skin and mean, hurtful spite masquerading as humour is a perfect fit for the dictator because both is reserved for majesties. His goons will occasionally complain about their opponents' own thin skin, only to invariously reveal who really owns the skin. And they only follow in their leader's cynical footsteps, just as with anything they have been for or against until hearing from him the opposite position. Case in point be Lindsey Graham.
And the combo says loud and clear, I can attack you for a laugh, you laugh at me, you wait and see. Awkwardly enthusiastic applause from the sycophants. Putin likes his jibs, too, and the chiming in by his immediate staff always seems somewhat fearful. Once this is turned towards him an excuse can be found to stop it. Stalin could reportedly be very jolly, too, in a boorish, brutish way. I don't think anyone around him was ever in the mood to find out whether one could be funny with him. And besides other after-effects, such as a rapid drop in popularity of the toothbrush-moustache and the first name Adolf, as well as a sinking feeling when watching images of emaciated human beings in cages, the image of the Germans as living irony-free became proverbial after Hitler (and arguably this isn't completely unjustified). And yet you can be sure that Hitler had a good snicker now and then, as you can be fairly certain that it wasn't about anything you'd laugh about.

And what does the combination eventually amount to, too soon in every case? That's right. Lèse-majesté.
When Trump attacks the late show hosts and SNL by calling them boring and claiming they have low ratings this shouldn't look to you like he's waving it off, that it's his way to hit back, and that's it. After all, the President of the United States is taking the time to complain over jokes poked at him (and quite frequently in the darkest of night). It should be seen in context of him attacking the networks, threatening to sue them, wanting to see their licenses withdrawn. Humour is a very powerful form of dissent, and Trump not only knows it, somewhere deep in there, instinctively, he knows they're doing it better than he ever can. Much better. And that alone stings.

His obsession with ratings, by the way, is more than just the way he sees the world as a former 'reality'-show host. Ratings are about approval. And he takes approval personally, it's where his mere papyrus membrane for a skin shows best. And the approval ratings for the Big Trump Show are dropping, and dropping.
As a dictator wanna-be he wants to do away with fair voting. With voting as such. He said as much. Once this intention has been realised approval ratings should no longer be of concern for him, one could even argue not on the way there either. Polls of the sort can be forbidden and other polls be conducted instead, polls that'll always show him as being overwhelmingly popular, and he can sent *his* army at the open dissenters, both his armies. But it *is* of concern to him, and I bet it will be.

The bubble of having to be the beloved leader is another check on the list. It isn't just enough to fake an election. It has to be a landslide, such a landslide the obvious becomes glaring.
Lukashenko's nearly 87% landslide. Putin's regular landslides. Trump did win this time, though the margin was thinner than initially reported, but for him it also had to be a landslide. Which is what he frequently calls it (while *still* whining about the 2020 election). Sandboxes ain't generating much of a landslide, Mr. Trump.
Public opinion, humour, and the press are all something a budding dictator is very much aware of, not to mentioned a fetched one. Same goes for culture.

In November 1945 Dmitri Shostakovich's 9th Symphony premiered, first in Leningrad, then in Moscow later the same month.[161] Before that the composer and pianist Svjatoslav Richter had played a version for two pianos to a select audience, including officials from Soviet culture. It may be that these officials hadn't been musicians themselves, and that they had difficulties transcribing what they heard into a full orchestral score in their heads.
The symphony had not only been announced by Shostakovich to be a work celebrating the Soviet victory over Nazi Germany, but was indeed expected to be that. Furthermore, it was the *9th* of his symphonies, a number that had invoked certain things ever since Beethoven's 9th. And initially Shostakovich seemed to have intended it as a broad, monumental work including a choir. He changed plans.
It turned out to be his shortest symphony. It's also droll, playful to the point of silly, and is very clearly deliberately not grand and pompous, except for when the pomposity is meant to be sarcastic, as a short but bombastically marching brass recurring in the first movement, and an overly obvious one later, reminding of at least one moustache-bearer.
While colleagues in the musical world cautiously liked it, professional critics in the land hit another note, and the Commission for Approval of Performers' Repertoires eventually banned the symphony altogether a few years later.

Side note, this commission, basically the censorship board, just as the over-heading Ministry of Education of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, did little without Stalin's approval and most only with it, or at least with an informed anticipation of what Stalin might think. Stalin was very much involved with the cultural life in the Soviet Union, and it had not only to do with control. He also wanted to be seen as being a *cultural* man.
The writer Mikhail Bulgakov had several run-ins with both these aspects. The author of 'The Master and Margarita' and 'Heart of a Dog' was also quite a prolific playwrite, writing a good number of plays for the Moscow Art Theatre, run at the time by Konstantin Stanislavski (of whose famous methods Bulgakov would eventually make fun in his unfinished 'Theatrical Novel').[162] But because Bulgakov was not exactly popular with the regime his plays were allowed to be rehearsed, often up to the dress rehearsal, only to be sawed off before the premiere. Chicanery.
There was one exception. His play 'The Days of the Turbins' was first fearfully withdrawn after heavy attacks in the regime-pleasing press, but it was Stalin himself who initiated the play to be reintroduced into the repertoire, where it then ran to enormous success (and praise on behalf of the same press, pulling a Graham).[163] It was reportedly one of Stalin's favourite plays at the time, presumably because it included people in uniforms, even though the play was based on Bulgakov's first, very serious novel, 'The White Guard', the characters expressing various ideologies, not only that of the Bolsheviks. As so often, the dictator is capricious.

Shostakovich's own encounters with Stalin would several times become up close, meeting the man. It was from those encounters and his observations that Shostakovich later concluded that the infamous Pravda review of his opera 'Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk' with the rather uninspired title

---

161 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symphony_No._9_(Shostakovich)

162 Mikhail Bulgakov, The Master and Margarita, see →140, The Heart of a Dog, 1925 (prohibited), first translated into English in 1968, Harcourt Brace, OCLC 816041597; although the novel wasn't published in the Soviet Union before 1987 it had been circulated by a dissident self-publishing movement - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samizdat
Theatrical Novel aka A Dead Man's Memoir aka Notes of a Dead Man aka Black Snow, 1930 (unfinished), first published 1965, Novyy Mir

163 Mikhail Bulgakov, The Days of the Turbins, 1925, premiere 1926, Moscow Art Theatre, directed by Konstantin Stanislavski, based on The White Guard, 1925, serialised in Rossiya, first published in English 1971

‘Chaos Instead of Music!’ had actually been penned by none other than Stalin himself, matching his boorish expressions and demeanour.[164]
That opera premiered in 1934, over a decade before his 9th Symphony, and then it was likely just misgivings about the music itself. It can be argued that Shostakovich, husband and father of two children, never allowed himself to be as brave as with this symphony. It was the opposite of the expected and desired grand symphony with the number 9, the celebration of the Soviet Union’s victory. A droll and thus disrespectful rebuke. And Stalin was reportedly furious.

Those who’d later talk about it, Shostakovich included, agreed that Stalin had no musical understanding. No musicality as such. He was a brute, at heart a rube. His tastes boring, dry and barren. Hitler’s taste can be summed up with the ‘Hirsch-Gemälde’, that ubiquitous oil painting depicting a roaring deer. Trump’s idea of interior design has a distinctive Liberace touch to it, and it’s gold over and over. The private residences of many of these characters scream opulence, but without much inspiration. Opulent but dead. Generally there’s frequently a strong retro-aspect of the out-fashioned, and that, too, is probably not a coincidence. Fascistic regimes are regressive, and their leaders and their proponents like to refer back to ‘better days’, ‘the good old days’, when the roles were decently distributed, etc. (in the Trump administration’s case those are apparently the 50s).
But all of them also want to be seen as the benefactors of the arts, the ‘right’ arts, that is. Combining control with a redirection of what in their minds art is supposed to be, and of the things it shan’t be that are in any way subversive. Or that remind you of the ‘wrong’ parts of history.
Enter Trump entering the Kennedy Center.[165]

Keeping an eye on how a story is told and who’s telling it, no matter whether it’s an allegory or the story in history, is always of vital interest for the autocrat. Being a storyteller can quickly have you join the ranks of the most dangerous jobs in the world. The two Trump administrations have from the beginning tried to leave no child behind in this respect.
Used to be that special interest groups were *directly* behind the attempts to censor. When Frank Zappa gave his testimony on censorship before the United States Senate Commerce, Technology, and Transportation committee he did so to oppose the efforts of another group of mothers, the Parents Music Resource Center, based on their close affiliation (marriages) with powerful politicians.[166] That’s kind of how we were used to this kind of thing from film and TV, a special interest group of rich people pushing an agenda by means of nudging their powerful friends and relatives, and not that this isn’t still happening ad nausea.
The Trump administration decided to take it one step further and ask you to do the trigger work for them. There’s nothing terribly new about that either, it’s basically just an incentive work to get people to spy on each other, just as within a number of agencies, NASA included, where personnel is now required (not asked, but *required*) to report on anyone conducting anything that could be identified as DEI activity. In America’s schools and kindergartens book-bans are nowadays initiated by ‘concerned’ parents.[167]

---

164 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lady_Macbeth_of_Mtsensk_(opera)#
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muddle_Instead_of_Music
As the Wikipedia entry above ascertains, translating the Pravda review’s title as ‘Muddle…’, it may not have been written by Stalin himself as was rumoured. Shostakovich himself concluded Stalin’s authorship, as relayed by Solomon Volkov in ‘Testimony’, 1979, Harper & Row, ISBN 0-87910-021-4, a memoir consisting of Shostakovich’s ‘dictates’ to Volkov, or interviews. There has been some controversy as to how much editing and how much original Shostakovich the book comprises.

165 https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2025/feb/24/trump-kennedy-center-takeover

166 Frank Zappa’s full testimony at the hearing:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hgAF8Vu8G0w

167 https://www.theguardian.com/education/2021/dec/23/us-book-bans-conservative-parents-reading

Indeed, why making something mandatory if you can just get the people to participate in the erosion of basic rights, including constitutionally guaranteed rights, voluntarily. All you need is a parent who'd vote for you no matter what. All you need is opening the opportunity. No further prompting needed. A little organizing, perhaps. A little herding of moms and dads. The right moms and dads, of course.
As a result we see what we naïvely thought we'd never see (again) in a free society, effective book banning. A 'concerned' parent putting a book on the list of what they deem should not be read by a child. The things that 'concerned' parent is 'concerned' about are the things they've elected Trump and their local representatives for because they happen to be exactly the things those representatives and the Trump administration had warned them they should be concerned about. Which, when it comes to children's books for kids of an age for which they need someone to read them to them, doesn't yet really make sense, since you don't normally come across toddlers wandering into book stores and libraries and asking for Twain and Hunter S. Thompson.

But it is happening to books for small kids, too, and the subjects of most of the concern here are, of course, gender questions and race/ethnicity. Inclusion in general. Equity. Diversity. While you may argue, those parents might argue and don't, that, while I'm the one buying or borrowing the book for my kid, the 'problem' of exposing my innocent child to such dangerous ideas is solved before it arises because I can quite simply pick another book, I don't have such control once little Ashley can read, and I don't have this control over what she learns about being nice to other children no matter what their background, not to mention history and foremost American history, if these nasty themes are being taught at school.
Quick side note, it is probably not a coincidence that the parents who involve themselves in getting books out of libraries and school curricula regularly do not see a problem or conflict when wanting other books, quite a few of which the remaining parents are not really too keen on where it's about those books replacing the ones they've been perfectly fine with, to be forcefully inserted. Main point for them about Jesus isn't his invitation to love thy kind but the obvious fact that he was white, according to *them*. Meanwhile, if the Christian nationalists will see their wish granted and Jesus return they'll have the opportunity to ask him what he thinks about the banning of books that deal with questions of how we can all live together peacefully, while certain books are left in the adult section, say in the Naval Academy's library, among them Hitler's 'Mein Kampf'.[168]
From children's books to school books and on to general libraries, and suddenly we have a list of 'subversive' authors for adults. Who knows. Perhaps even 'un-American' authors.

With the opportunity provided for these parents it emerges right away that there are different projects that are supposed to be swatted with one blow. One of them is a rewriting of history. If you wanna make people believe that your aim is to make America great *again*, that means there must have been a time when it *had* been great, and now it no longer is.[169]
Simplest market trick of the far right: don't project into the future for the purpose of making things better, point at the past. Some vague point in the past. When things had already been better. Preferably a point people can hardly remember, if at all, if they'd been around as children. If they

---

https://news.northeastern.edu/2023/06/30/book-banning-parents-schools/
As the Northeastern University press article clarifies, the *concerned parents* don't all just grow in the woods. The PMRC about which Frank Zappa was concerned has found its modern day equivalence in the 'Moms for Liberty':
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moms_for_Liberty
https://pen.org/book-bans/

168 Anderson Cooper on Hegseth's swiping at the Naval Academy's library:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H5XEDeecGEg

169 The re-writing of history is another common thread tying autocratic systems together, and you may want to start early. Katy Tur, New curriculum in Oklahoma schools teaches conspiracy theories about 2020 election:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h4pc7zuWW2Q

hadn't they'd need history books, of course, which is precisely the thing we want to 'amend'. Ah, the good old days. When things were simpler. When things were better. Good Morning, America. Driveways, mommy in the kitchen, daddy coming home from work. Schlitz beer advertisement. 'But daddy, I only see white people on those.' As I said, son. Simpler times.

Regression is a main feature with all autocracies, and to incite nostalgia by pointing into the past you first have to do something about all the dirty spots. Things had also been simpler in the USSR and the GDR, no real unemployment, order, people were decent! *And* – gulags. The KGB, the Stasi. People being disappeared. And yet you'll not only find people with nostalgia for those days, you found them right away, right after the Soviet Union had crumbled, right after the wall had come down. Dissatisfaction over the not perfect present can all too easily be exploited.

In the U.S. it's basically the desire to be distracted from the responsibility over a national history built on genocide, exploitation and the restriction of the most basic human rights, including any right that would have enabled the murdered, exploited and restricted to do anything to change their predicament, and the distraction is being steadily moved to outright denial.[170] And the native peoples of the North American continent, and the descendents of human beings brought over in ships as human cattle look on with flabbergasted expressions as the revisionists tell them, 'look at all the good things we've done for you!'
The 'greatest country in the world' has to have been the greatest country always. Never mind that there never was a respite in everything that prevents greatness. Starting with the number one clue: there is a profound whiteness to all these agendas.

Which is one of those segues that establish themselves, seemingly, then again it's but another point on the same grand undertaking. Quite recently Elon Musk was in the purely Musk-dedicated flow of headlines with a new one, his own private project of spreading the Elon-seed.[171] Already having fathered fourteen (*14*!) children, he's actively searching for women purely as breeding vessels for his line. He presents the threat of there being ever fewer children as 'the greatest threat to humanity' (I can think of a few others), but it's real hard not to see a personal effort in eugenics here, and with the appropriately queasy feeling in the stomach that may rise to join the exterior world any time soon.
Okay. First of all, and this goes for what comes below as well, with well over 8 billion humans populating the planet, each one with their own requirements in resources, our species getting endangered by not producing enough offspring really isn't the first threat that comes to mind. Does he perhaps mean that there's more and more old people (you know, those pesky pests that demand healthcare) vs fresh ones? Actually there are lots and lots of children presently around, and many of them could do with a set of parents. Everybody makes fun of Angelina Jolie for adopting so many kids while frenetically applauding the parents calling in on the TV show screen with their two dozen home-baked brats, instead, you know, asking for them to be *fined*. But the children Mrs. Jolie invites into her home and life are already *here*, and they come from backgrounds that would, had they not been lucky enough to be saved out from them, barely offer them a fair chance. Seems like a good solution to both problems to me.
But ah. Lemme guess. Not the kind of children you had in mind, Elon?
No, the children on Elon's mind are the children from '*our*' own gene-stock. Doesn't help the impression that we're talking white Elon-seeds.

---

170 Something similar can be currently observed in Germany in context of the AfD's success

171 Arwa Mahdawi on Musk and breeding:
https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2024/nov/19/he-has-already-fathered-many-children-now-musk-wants-all-of-the-us-to-embrace-extreme-breeding
Moira Donegan on American pro-natalism:
https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/apr/23/america-pro-natalism-women

Very shortly after Trump came out with his own ideas for American motherhood. Now, don't think that this is a new thing either, neither in the historic context nor the world view of the far right. When the neo-Nazis marched up in Charlottesville with their tiki-torches and chants about replacement it could have been the battle cry over the greatest worry of the white supremacists.[172] Not only are they surrounded by *continents* full of people of other ethnicities, and always have been, literally masses of them, way more than there are people wearing piggy-pink flesh for skin colour, they also find this variety of shading where ever 'here' on a roughly spherical globe is. Replace words instead of people, and instead of Jews it could have been Blacks, Asians and the good people from K2-18 b.[173]

With projections that in the near future black and Hispanic people will cease to be a minority in the U.S. it can be safely assumed that Trump's incentive program to promote motherhood, and the mothering of more than one or two children, isn't aimed at anyone but white women, and here, too, the purpose is double-tongued, the aim is to tackle two issues at once – the Weaver is at it again. The program, including a $5000 cheque (which should do for the first wholesale purchase for the newborn, thank you very much) and access to presumably new and 'better' education for the child, or rather children, is meant to maintain one certain ethnic group's majority and thus dominance over the others, and with all those successive babies in one oven the mothers can from now on focus on what God placed them here on Earth for, just as the old advertisements taught us, instead of engaging in such corrupting activities as an academic career.[174] Picket fence, driveway, dad's home, and mommy's got something special prepared today.

Of course there's another historic purpose, one that is also on Putin's mind, who is very much in favour of Russian mothers bearing Russian children, which is keeping the numbers up for the motherland. I mean, fatherland. Every child that is born be potentially a soldier for the nation, in the eventuality of push coming to shove. It's a big thing with dictators, and as a big thing it's yet another tell-tale sign. Should you be worried over some imagined 'purity' there's always eugenics, and while Musk with his salute-arm and his penis may not yet go quite as far as using a lab, he certainly seems to want and try going the more manual Mendel-way.

There's always a danger that the rapid flow of news items will indulge themselves as points in such a text like this, so to wrap up this section I shall simply state that, while the cascade of assaults on progress, decency and the idea of democracy that the Trump administration is raining down on the U.S., threatening to corrode other nations by what the splash-overs of this foul brew is hitting them with and turning the political globe into a far more dangerous world, while all this is dressed according to given opportunities, none of it adds anything new to the anatomic poster by which you identify the dictator. Special may be the one or other circumstance, but Trump fits the tyrant to the T. He compares to other dictators so well because he is one.
And it's worth repeating that nothing about wanting to be a dictator is normal. Nothing about this desire is healthy, it's in itself a clear and loud sign that there's something wrong with that person, as is with anyone wanting to serve such a regime.

---

172 https://www.npr.org/2022/08/12/1116942725/the-charlottesville-rally-5-years-later-its-what-youre-still-trying-to-forget

173 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/K2-18b
We can't be sure. Perhaps the K2-18beans with a decently purple skin might have a problem with their neighbour K2-18beans because of their marine blue skin, in which case theirs would be a budding civilisation that won't make it either.

174 https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/may/06/trump-baby-boom-bonus-checks
https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/may/13/trump-baby-bonus-childbirth-pronatalism

You may tick all the boxes in your definition of dictator, tyrant, autocrat yourself and see if there's something missing. Meanwhile I'll focus on one other little box, since not so many people seem to do it.

Although I don't have an update on the situation with Mr. Ábrego García since his relocation to an undisclosed facility, there's an important other update on the U.S. Executive Branch's assault against the Judiciary to be made.
Yesterday, on Friday 25th, the FBI arrested Milwaukee judge Hannah Dugan after alleging she had aided a subject who had appeared before her in court in evading ICE officers the day before. Judge Dugan was accosted by several agents and handcuffed in front of the courthouse as she was arriving for work in an apparent show of force. FBI director Kash Patel weighed in via X, accusing her of obstruction and misdirection of enforcement officers, a move that is not normally counted to the FBI director's repertoire. AG Pam Bondi appeared on Fox News, indirectly calling judge Dugan 'deranged' and claiming that there were judges believing themselves to be beyond the law. 'We *are* prosecuting them,' she said. Judge Dugan, who's out on bond, has responded to the allegations by saying that she regretted the arrest, and that she was looking forward to vindicating herself.

It might well be that the allegations are factually correct. In which case judge Dugan will have to justify her actions in a court of law. The arrest of the judge itself, and particularly the way the was arrested have already been widely interpreted and condemned as an intimidation attempt, a message sent to other judges and the Judiciary itself. Seen in context with the Trump administration's continuing refusal to follow court orders, this appears to constitute a huge step up the escalation ladder, especially with the Trump-appointed and -loyal AG and FBI director being this eager to chime in.
It was interesting to read the first dozen or so comments under the initial MSNBC video I watched about it. Most of them a variation on 'It has begun' and 'And so it begins'. I only disagree about this having been the first threshold. It's been rolling for a while now.

An update following this update, typed while proofreading this thing.
The aforementioned relocation of Mr. Ábrego García has so far been the last of it. It's hard to imagine any other El Salvador prison in which he could be held as much of an improvement for him, and his location now being unknown to the press is worrying. It looks as if both the Trump administration and Bukele are hoping the issue will be replaced by the flood of others in the public eye. By all accounts it might even work. Within this flood news about Ábrego García have been thinning.

Meanwhile a 2nd deportee has been named who'd been deported despite a legal settlement over his asylum application.[175]
And a Newark mayor, Mayor Ras Baraka, has been arrested after being denied a scheduled inspection of a detention center for which he was joined by members of Congress, under extremely dubious trespassing charges that do not seem to be supported on a video taken of the incident, which shows an excessive over-presence of uniforms, some of which were masked, in an apparent show of intimidation.[176]

---

175 https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/may/06/trump-el-salvador-deportation-lozano-camargo
And I'm sure he won't be the last.

176 'Never seen anything like it in my life' - New Jersey congressman reacts to Newark mayor arrest:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CUjfHM8l1QQ
Interview with Mayor Ras Baraka:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-MdwHCOWwiE

8. The Stupid – an often neglected aspect of the autocrat

Gilda Radner, The Right to Extreme Stupidity:
https://www.youtube.com/shorts/b50kJbiG3ks

Donald Trump is not a bright man. That sentence may seem like stating the obvious to many people. In this age of conflation I feel I must explain that I'm trying to choose my words with care, and when I use words like 'stupid', 'moron' or 'idiot' I'm being more specific than could be thought of me.
I can see no evidence for Trump suffering from any particularly debilitating disorders or disabilities, mentally speaking. He's run a number of businesses, quite a few of them in the ground, admittedly, he hosted a 'reality'-TV show, and although he only recently accumulated wealth to a degree he'd hitherto only pretended to possess he was, propped up with an inheritance to waste, never poor. He became the President of the United States, twice. He's able to drive a car – though all I've ever really seen him driving is a golf cart. He's also able to cheat, lie and delay himself out of legal troubles. I'm listing these things to clarify, severe mental disability won't allow any of this, not legally and not practically.
Which is why, besides not being a monster, I'd never use words like 'stupid' or 'moron' to describe anyone with a mental disability. A person with a learning disability, for example, someone at the more severe end of the autism spectrum, or someone with brain damage. So when am I using the word stupid?

The English language distinguishes between 'stupid' and 'being stupid'. Being stupid is easy. It's not so easy to avoid. All of us are being stupid at one point or another. Make mistakes we could have easily avoided, do something irrational out of stubbornness, all of us have once or twice seen

the garden rake in our path and stepped on the tines nevertheless. That doesn't make us stupid. It only proves we're fallible.
I don't want to break into a long semantic excursion about borderlines, simply said, there's two ways of how you could define 'stupid' as opposed to 'being stupid', and they do combine to much the same in the end. It's basically a variation of a quote widely attributed to Einstein, though there's not much evidence to support that it was actually him who'd said it, namely that insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results. In variation, if you're being stupid over and over, especially when always over the same thing, we might at some point be ready to call you stupid.
That, however, might as well point to a blind spot, a kink in your synaptic processes, similar to a passage in a long monologue that you keep forgetting for no other reason than because you've forgotten it the first time.

The more promising definition, I think, has to do with decision. If it's a mental problem that leads to the deficiency isn't your fault, that's not a decision. It is, however, a decision to remain purposefully ignorant about something and then to nevertheless continue to make judgement calls in regards to what one doesn't want to know more about. That is part one. Part two comes with the numbers, then, as before, meaning when you make a habit out of it.
I've met people who're positively proud about not being able to speak any other language than their mother-tongue. To be clear: not speaking another language has nothing to do with Stupid. There can be many reasons resulting in someone only speaking one language. It becomes a practical deficit in a situation when speaking a second language could be useful, not necessarily the other's birth language, but perhaps a third language the two of you speak.
But this pride over only speaking the language one grew up with exists. It might, and I suspect it often has begun as a defence mechanism, covering up the embarrassment of not speaking another language, which some people might (unjustly) interpret as making them seem stupid. But I've often witnessed how this particular pride of not being able to do something was almost intended as a weapon. 'I'm sorry, Mr. Policeman, do you speak English?' 'German. We're in Germany.'
I suppose the officer in question will learn the respective language of every country he's spending a vacation in.

And the wider the per-person application of the decision of not wanting to learn, including just the most required basics about a subject one nevertheless recklessly opines about, not to mention the causing of effects that may touch other lives, the more justified is the omission of the 'to be'. And the garden of Stupid is populated by a broad range of sub-species. In short, when I'm calling someone *stupid* in the context of this text I mean it, and I'm not being thoughtless about it.

In my view Donald Trump is a stupid man. My opinion, in the light of everything I've just clarified, would appear to be supported by the impressive amount of incompetence in just this one man. Professional incompetence just as plainly human. That he has become the President of the United States should not deflect from the by now large museum of exhibits. I once more call upon you remembering that quote from 'All the President's Men', which can be supplemented with another from 'Margin Call', in which Big Boss Tuld invites Mr. Sullivan to explain the state of the affair to him as if he'd be talking to a golden retriever, because whatever brought him to where he was sitting now, he assures him, it wasn't brains.[177]
Smarts aren't the necessary component for getting power, not when you set out to acquiring it with brutal force or fraudulent methods to begin with. Ruthlessness is. Ambition before that. We often say that dictatorial states are destined to fail and fall, unfortunately some of them are taking an awful long time to do that. But that's not because their tyrants are cunning foxes. The brutality

177 All the President's Men, see →7
Margin Call, 2011, written and directed by J.C. Chandor

serves the duration. Otherwise it'd be just work. Which is why, after the scapegoat minorities, the 2nd batch of victims are always the people of the nation in question. You put in the work to see to it that your country and the nation actually prosper instead of just you, and you might as well stop being a dictator.

Trump qualifies for the word *stupid*, but of course he himself would strongly disagree. Which already is a defty slice on the stupid-pie of percentages. 'None is a fool who knows himself a fool,' says Cyrano to Christian.[178] And no fool there is who does know.
Donald Trump has declared his own perception as being exceptionally smart numerous times, and by now there shouldn't be any doubt that he means that, too. The 'stable genius' has demonstrated his exceptional cognitive capabilities with 'person, woman, man, camera, TV', has blown our inferior minds by explaining the process of 'the Weave', he's using the best, most beautiful words, using words many of us don't know, without him what would we call the things we buy and put in a bag, and just to be sure we all understand, he's repeated that he is basically the smartest man on Earth.
Which no smart person would do. Not to mention that his attacks on his opponents routinely has them being 'stupid' and 'retarded', just to widen the gap between them and the brilliance of the new sun king even more. We're well beyond concealed shame.

Consequently, we also ought to believe that he indeed sees all his plans, cracking, exploding and backfiring around him like a fireworks storage that's ablaze, as being the work of a genius. Which begs the question, how does he keep the walls up? How does he protect his vulnerable…, whatever constitutes his mind from the harsh reality that emerges from everything turning into rubble that he touches? How to keep the barrier erected between this inflated self-perception and the effects he has in the world so starkly conflicting with it?
Just as I write this, details emerge from Trump's latest meeting with Zelenskyy in Rome where both attended the Pope's funeral. The encounter had been a sharp contrast to their previous meeting in the White House when Trump and his Vice Vance had ganged up on Zelenskyy in what was clearly a pre-arranged dressing down, demanding thanks (for what?) and respect in the most disrespectful (President Zelenskyy is a nation's leader, too, you know) and disgusting display of diplomatic bullying I've ever seen, ending with Zelenskyy being pretty much thrown out of the House.
This meeting was not only different in apparent tone, the two men sitting in front another on red upholstered chairs of the type that probably go as plain in the Vatican, their heads inclined to each other as if exchanging whispers about what to do regarding one of the other campers, but also in Trump's tweeting out-pour following the occasion. Keen on getting a peace deal done ASAP, if no longer 'on day one', and so far having seen this 'deal' only through Putin's retina, with the plan being at least where it concerns this administration to basically concede everything to Russia, save Ukraine as a whole, Trump now suddenly complains about Ukrainian civilians being killed in attacks aimed at civilians, despite the ceasefire talks, musing 'maybe Putin's tapping me along.'[179] You think?
Some may call it an epiphany while rightly warning how inconstant Trump's mind is. To me it was yet another display of the childlike, the root of his incompetence. It reveals that it had probably been Vance who'd been behind the specifics of the in the face-attack on Zelenskyy in the White House, and it had indeed been him initiating it, with Trump, shall we say, tapping along. He's alone with Putin, he spouts Kremlin talking points. He's with Vance, he's convinced and follows the lead. He's alone with someone sensible for a change, and in a sombre environment, suddenly he thinks, 'maybe…'

178 Edmond Rostand, Cyrano de Bergerac, 1897, premiered the same year

179 https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/apr/26/trump-and-zelenskyy-hold-very-productive-ceasefire-talks-in-rome

That's the behaviour of a child that's still trying to orientate. In the moment and on the surface it may seem like a milder, more introspective Trump who was able to listen for once in this case, but if that's the overall dynamic it's no less dangerous for a U.S. President. And, of course, everything may change with the next conversation partner. Talking of having the President's ear.

The child may insist on the boundaries of its fantasy land, but the fool does not even see them. And what about the fools like him? For they are all fools. Don't be misled by the myth of Putin the sly fox. There's no genius in the wars he's leading and the murders he commits that sheer brute force won't accomplish fast. That smile he was wearing on every state visit before the world slowly began to wake up about him? That was a smirk. A smirk over how stupid everyone could possibly be. Don't inflate your idea of someone's smarts based on how stupid everyone around them is behaving. To anyone who really wanted to look it had all been fairly obvious from the start. Smarts include a talent for subtlety. There's nothing subtle about waging war. There's nothing subtle about having people murdered and disappeared. There's nothing subtle about the oppression of your opposition, of the part of the population that opposes you. And there was nothing remotely smart or wise about launching the assault on Ukraine, nor is there in the way it is being fought to this day, and not only in light of how Mr. Putin had miscalculated about the Ukrainian people, a miscalculation he'd shared with most of the rest of the world.
Nothing smart or brilliant in anything Putin says, either, not ever. A lot of pomp. A lot of manly man-man stuff. A lot of threatening. You don't need to be smart to conduct Putin's murdering-, oppressing- and usurping business, not if you're the individual who calls himself Russia. It only needs one thing to do all of it while knowing it'll land the international community in a pickle at worst, and that's having inherited an immense arsenal of nuclear weapons.

Hitler wasn't smart and brilliant. He was not. He was brutal and ruthless, and bitter, couple all that with ambition, and you got yourself a Fuhrer. Somehow the for some reason die-hard myth has survived in some dark recesses that he was a tactical genius (and yes, most of the folks clinging to it turn out to be neo-Nazis, but not only). He was not. His 'strategy' mostly consisted of speed and brutality. And a few betrayed pacts. Element of surprise. There, doesn't take a Heisenberg.
If there were any tactically apt personnel in Hitler's army that doesn't reflect back on him (and shouldn't be celebrated, anyway). It compares to what Congresswoman Crockett said about the 'genius' Musk who has enough sense to employ people with real smarts.
Take away the position of Fuhrer, the uniform, the power, have Hitler stand there as Mr. Hitler in the front garden next door, and what have you? A frustrated, small-minded, flustered fool like so many others, complaining about the neighbours, complaining about the foreigners, saying things you don't wanna hear about the Jews. A small man with no creativity. Only a lot of anger. The only things distinguishing him from that ridiculous figure in the garden were ambition, ruthlessness and a little help.

And the same goes for them all. Mussolini? Have a brief look. Amin? Dim as a brick. Not to mention the kings and emperors throughout our history who were kings and emperors by birthright. When saying that wanting all this power isn't normal, what can we say about people being born into it, growing up being told that they weren't even supposed to know that they have a choice in the matter? What does *that* do to you?
We know what it does in what Christopher Hitchens called the necrocracy of North Korea, where Kim Jong-il is still officially the head of the nation, despite the fact that he's dead and has been succeeded by his son Kim Jong-un.[180] Never has anyone managed to look more like the spoilt brat Mr. Kim really is. He doesn't have some genius it absolutely doesn't take anyway to keep a country oppressed to the absurd extent as is the case with his. All he needs is the absolute brutality of his family and decades of repressive indoctrination coming with it. And a little help from outside.

180 Christopher Hitchens, god Is Not Great, 2007, Hachette Book Group USA, ISBN 978-0-446-57980-3

Matchstick man al-Assad's regime would have *long* fallen if not for his small-minded, self-centred, short-term interests aligning with the longer term interests of Putin. In al-Assad's regime, too, the single tool to keeping it together was brute force and terror, and to an unimaginable degree. Smarts aren't required for that.
Interests aligning, and while the respective ideologies might still differ in detail, the overall ideology of making this a planet to be ruled by the few tops it all. Listen to Anne Applebaum.

From Ceaușescu to Lukashenko, from Stalin to Putin, from Orbán to Trump, rubes, the lot of them. One is tempted to think that brutal dictatorial regimes are destined to fall, and one might feel vindicated in this assumption once they do fall, but once again, sometimes it can take a terribly long time. Stalin's reign ended with his death from the results of a stroke. It had lasted 30 years. Putin has been holding on a long time, too. And with the trend of such regimes cooperating beyond the brittle pacts of the past that left each dictator with little reason to trust the other (and that might never really change either) they might keep each other in power for even longer periods in the future.
Ultimately, however, the path of dictatorship is also the stupider one in respect to what we laughably call the long-term (ask the geologist, the palaeontologist, the evolutionary biologist and the astronomer). Because the brute rule of the rube is essentially rape, of individuals, whole people, and the land, the price tag will be high, quicken the decay by means of economic consequences, and contribute as root cause to its own demise. Building dictatorial alliances will only stretch the time until such outcome for a bit.

There's of course no cause for satisfaction once it's reached. The damage that is done in the meantime is colossal, and we might have gotten used to the idea that, with time, we can rebuild, but there's a limit to what a planetary eco-system can take. There's a limit, too, to what societies can take. And we're living in a period of human history when one of the outcomes can be the short-cut to ultimate destruction.
Ultimate destruction, the doing away with the project of life.

The window of life on planet Earth is shorter than you may think to begin with. 3.8 billion years ago, if we're generous, the first extremely simple, unicellular lifeforms emerged, not long after the formation of the planet roughly 4.5 billion ago, but it wasn't until a little over half a billion years ago when the first serious multicellular beings began having a go, with the Cambrian explosion resulting in the incredible lushness of diversity of everything we can *see* with our own, naked eyes. We're often explained how the sun will have eventually exhausted its fuel, expand to a red giant, divulge Mercury and Venus, and leave Earth a pill of charcoal in 5 billion years or so. But life on Earth will end much sooner than that. The sun, from its formation by collapsing masses of gas, has constantly increased radiating, and it never stopped. It's called solar heating. And it won't stop on its way to spending its fuel. Conservative estimates, that's the estimates giving us more time, put the time when Earth's oceans will have evaporated and the carbon cycle ended at roughly one billion years from now – mark that such a state will have been *reached* by then. And that these are the conservative estimates. So along Earth's existence span of between 9.5 – 10 billion years, 4 billion are already capped at the end, leaves the 1 billion, plus 3.8 billion of life in total, but only a bit over half a billion when thinking only of what we'd be able to see, and that's the window of life on this planet.[181]
One should think…
And that's the temporal angle. And that's only if nothing else happens.

181 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_life
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Future_of_Earth#

The perhaps biggest tragedy of the two absolutely vital priorities of our time, the environmental, including the massive threat of our climate catastrophe (comparable catastrophes in Earth's past have contributed to most life going extinct several times, but, with the exception of impactors, never over such a short amount of time), as well as the threat of thermonuclear annihilation, is that those inescapable priorities shouldn't even *be* our priorities.
Because they had been perfectly avoidable. For how long have we known about what's now known as the greenhouse effect, and about the danger of us turning it into a threat? 1856, that's right. Look up Eunice Newton-Foote.[182] And when were we first presented with a solution? Merely two decades later, Augustine Mouchot's solar generator.[183] The campaigns of the coal lobbyists that decided the route humanity would take were fought with the same arguments I heard from their professional descendents in my life time. Too expensive, too big. Same you could have said about any technology, including what is needed for ore extraction. Recently solar tech has surpassed fossil tech as being the cheaper option for the first time. That so despite the fact that most households are still being kept on gas and oil. Despite the fact that on a large scale solar is still not even a consumer good. That's a first. Imagine had we only started with that a little earlier, say, when the awareness of the problem first met its solution. What a different world this would be.
Meanwhile, show of hands if you can tell me why it is so cold on Mars.
No. Wrong.
How many of you have heard of loss of magnetic field?[184]
Look it up, and then learn that the same thing also happens to Venus (where it is counter-acted upon by a massive run-away greenhouse warming effect).[185] Of the four rocky inner planets, that's two. Two out of four. Perhaps we should allow to consider the possibility of a trend? And the reason might be simple. There just might be no guarantee that a magnetic field will last 'forever'. And without it we'd be toast. No survival possible. All life would die.
Besides the potential smaller- and large scale threats comets and asteroids can turn into, there are more dangers, some of which could end all life on Earth, and of which you also haven't heard of. Some are more exotic than others, some are more unlikely, e.g. extremely powerful gamma rays pushed by very powerful supernovae, it needs a real unlucky chance to be hit by one of those, but then again, bad luck is just bad timing.[186] It's a long list, and it already begins with features here on Earth.
These are the problems for which we could need some attention.
And one would think…
And that's the conditional angle.

Finally there's the spatial angle.

---

182 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eunice_Newton_Foote#%22Circumstances_Affecting_the_Heat_of_the_Sun's_Rays%22

183 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Augustin_Mouchot

184 https://www.planetary.org/space-images/mars-atmosphere-vs-the-solar-wind
Mars has lost its internally generated magnetic field cca. 3-4 billion years ago, the effects of which include its surface being sterilized by the highly charged particles radiated by the sun, the solar wind, perpetually bombarding it unimpeded, as well as its atmosphere being flayed off by the same solar wind – it's down to 1% of that of Earth, too thin to trap warmth even for an atmosphere that is made to 95% of carbon dioxide.

185 https://www.esa.int/Science_Exploration/Space_Science/Venus_Express/Where_did_Venus_s_water_go
https://www.esa.int/Science_Exploration/Space_Science/Mars_Express/Mars_and_Venus_are_surprisingly_similar

186 In 2022 we were lucky that the gamma ray burst that hit Earth and messed with the ionosphere was 2 billion years old (corresponding with the distance of its origin) and had thus weakened considerably:
Piersanti et al - Evidence of an upper ionospheric electric field perturbation correlated with a gamma ray burst:
https://www.nature.com/articles/s41467-023-42551-5.pdf
The bad news is that there are stars of similar mass that are a lot closer to us.

Out there are moons, Jupiter's Europa, Ganymede, possibly Callisto, Saturn's Enceladus, possibly Mimas, quite possibly Titan, by all appearances also Neptune's Triton, that harbour subsurface bodies of waters, likely oceans, possibly global.[187] These oceans may contain life. Analysis of the vapour Enceladus helpfully sprays out through its cracks have shown that the watery stage for life is set.[188]
If there is life in one or more of these oceans it'll probably be microbial. But even if it's more complex – Enceladean shrimp, Ganymedean krill, European fish – it'll never be as immense, as incredibly diverse, as astonishing as on Earth. And there might be none. Just promising, but dead waters.
Next chance Proxima Centauri. 4.2 light years. A spacecraft would need tens of thousands of years to get there. Proxima Centauri has been observed. A turbulent system, part of a multi-star environment. No conclusive bio-signal. No tech-signal.
Anything farther away is much, much farther away. There have been some tantalizing observations of the one or other extremely far away exo-planet, most recently K2-18 b, where the atmosphere might possibly contain traces of dimethyl sulfide and dimethyl disulfide, which here on Earth we only know to be produced by lifeforms, but these results have not yet been conclusively confirmed, and they are other factors that could have contributed.[189] And K2-18 b is situated 124 light years away.
In other words, so far nada. So far this is it. This. Where you stand. This is the oasis. The incredible, implausible oasis in a lifeless desert farther than you can imagine.

Take the temporal angle. Combine it with the conditional. Add the spatial.
Not only is life locally exceedingly rare, and not only is its time rather limited on this one given, small world, it is also perpetually threatened as it is.
And one would *think*…

Instead we're risking it all by handing over life's fate to crazy clowns who're the least suited to govern, not to mention to ensure the survival of all this, boorish, brutish rubes, and we're allowing it again and again and again. To think that this locally super-rare, precious, incomparable mere *moment* of life could end because of *one* man. One *stupid* man.

So why are we doing it? Why are we allowing it? Again and again?
With Trump we've now allowed it *twice*. It's not as if we could have said that we didn't see it coming, certainly not this time around.
Is it?

One last-minute link, referring to the subject of global priorities; climatologist and geophysicist Michael E. Mann in April 22nd:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yTzACUAg_QQ

---

187 https://science.nasa.gov/jupiter/jupiter-moons/europa/
https://science.nasa.gov/jupiter/jupiter-moons/ganymede/
https://www.esa.int/esearch?q=callisto
https://science.nasa.gov/saturn/moons/enceladus/
https://science.nasa.gov/saturn/moons/mimas/
https://science.nasa.gov/saturn/moons/titan/
https://www.planetary.org/worlds/triton

188 https://www.planetary.org/articles/signs-of-life-enceladus
https://www.swri.org/newsroom/press-releases/key-building-block-life-found-saturn-s-moon-enceladus

189 https://www.planetary.org/articles/possible-sign-of-life-k2-18-b
https://www.esa.int/esearch?q=K2-18+b

9. It's the Voters, Stupid

There's three ways to make a moon.[190] And as many to make a dictator. There's the coup, the sudden, usually military take-over, following a period of rumbling or rushing into a vacuum. Then there's inheritance, an already family-based business of a government, and it may pass from dictator to dictator or from still relatively politically broad-minded yet already ordained rather than elected reign to a real dick of an heir. And then there's the elected dictator.

It's already the heart of the matter, whether the dictator to be voted into office will quite obviously work on turning your democracy, from feeble to seemingly robust, into an autocracy or whether he (I'm sticking with the males for now) had indeed been so cunning as to totally conceal his intentions. Usually it's the former. It's the former because the process of establishing yourself as a dictator requires some help and preparations, you need allies, you need sycophants, and you'll need some muscle, you'll generally need to get everyone in line, and you need to start working on eroding the institutions that may stand in your way as early as possible, and all those things tend to make themselves quite known.
You'll also need a platform to run on. A program. Which is essentially just a list of grievances. Not your grievances, but you'll claim they are. People don't like to be alone. They like it when there's someone sharing their concerns, with a loud and clear voice, an understandable voice, a voice like theirs, using vocabulary like theirs. It'll make it easier for them to just ignore your money and the campaign contributions.

---

190 1. The Semolina Method: take enough gas and dust to have sufficient mass to collapse and ignite to a star, with leftovers forming an accretion disk around that star – you can expect that disk to clump, those clumps to become planets, with smaller clumps nearby, to orbit the planets as moons from the get-go.
2. The Crash Method: have a larger object slam into an even larger object, preferably when both are still young, hot and mushy, and end up with the remains of this collision orbiting the larger object as a moon; this is likely how our moon came into existence.
3. The Catch Method: wait for an object to be nudged off its prior orbit for some reason, to come close enough to you (not too close) at a not too speedy velocity, for you to capture it into an orbit around you; this is probably how Neptune ended up with Triton.

Campaigns are a real thing in the United States. Not that they aren't a real thing elsewhere, but in the U.S. they practically begin after election. They're a big show, on every media-outlet on every medium imaginable, including the front lawn. The probably most adequate way to look at it from the outside is to be double-minded about it. On the one hand it's a symptom of how serious these people are about it, which is a good thing. Voting is a constitutional right that is seen as a duty, and it is not only enacted by those who act upon these emotions instead of just having them, it is being celebrated. Some U.S. Americans even go so far as to see it as the distinguishing factor when comparing themselves to other nations, which is not a good thing, because obviously they're making a comparison on the basis of missing facts. Other countries hold elections, too.
The next question is how the voters will come after their right and duty to make their voice heard and count, that is to say, on what will they base their choice?

We are a simple species in so many respects. Take lies, for example. The number one rule for a successful lie is that it's got to be simple. Not necessarily convincing, oh, it doesn't have to be convincing at all, but simple, that's a must. Simple enough for a species as simple as we are to not wanting to doubt it, to wanting to believe it before turning to the complex excavation of a complicated truth instead, turning away from complexity as if we'd hit a pipe and a whiff of hydrogen sulfide. What an excellent deterrent, complexity.[191]
We're simple in the way we vote, too, most of us. How do we vote? We vote on one or two, sometimes even three issues that are important to us. Stress on *us*. Issues that concern us personally. Which isn't wrong per se. Except that there are usually a few more than just three issues on the table, and that these might not be the same issues that are front of line for every single voter, and that there might be issues that are not at all a priority for you, but that really should be, including some that may require your cooperation, if not even readiness to be inconvenienced. Not to mention that priorities can conflict with others.
It's often pointed out if and when a part of the electorate is voting against their interests. Which is of course an apt thing to do, and it's a common and disturbing enough phenomenon, achieved more by one of the two main parties by the application of the above-mentioned principle of simple lies to make people oppose what they don't quite seem to understand they'd actually prefer, one infamous example being the banner reading 'take your government hands off my Medicare'.[192]

I would like to add, though, that it can easily become just as counter-productive when people *only* vote according to their own personal interests. We'll get back to the matter of single-issue voting. The parties in the game see themselves forced to strategically follow the voters. I don't know, perhaps there are plenty of those who see it as a natural given. What do you say as a candidate during a town hall when confronted with the flood of issues as thrown at you by the voters present? You'll make sure you'll give the impression that you're on their side, on the side of each of them, that all their concerns are yours, that all their issues will be addressed once they've elected you. Which with a population approaching 350 million, each one with their personal priorities, is plainly impossible to achieve.

Let's put a pin in this and have a look at the recent U.S. election that gave the world Donald Trump once again, specifically at how the show went for the Democratic Party.
While it was underway, the show, I've heard quite a number of pundits and commentators say that Kamala Harris was running 'a good campaign'. I couldn't disagree more. My own definition was closer to wordings like 'disaster', 'catastrophic' and 'holy fuck, that guy's going to be President again'.

---

191 This is actually an indulgence, an amended quote from a yet to be published science fiction trilogy of mine.

192 https://www.huffpost.com/entry/get-your-goddamn-governme_b_252326

The field was pretty burned to begin with. Starting with Joe Biden's old man stubbornness when for way too long he refused to drop out. Already when he'd announced he'd run. There were several key moments that made me count with a second Trump presidency, Biden's abysmal performance during the presidential debate, which, to my credit, I predicted, and I only brought myself to watching stretches of it later, once I was shock-inocculated by virtually every shell-shocked MSNBC anchor, or the moment Trump's ear got shot – as much as I believe that Trump being incapacitated by ill health or natural mortality would have left the world better off, the assassination attempt sealed a second Trump term with only a little gap for a breath of hope left.[193] [194]
We don't like to be alone with our concerns, and I felt a little less so with Mehdi Hasan's take reflecting my own: for the latter stage of his time in office, then-President Biden had *one* job, only one, to prevent Trump's return to the White House, prevent it, and be it by taking himself out of the race.[195] And he flunked it. And that be his legacy. Any achievement of Biden's from his time in the Oval means exactly *nothing*, it means nothing in comparison to this failure, and it means nothing because Trump has already managed to destroy most of it during his first hundred days in office. What good are the right (though insufficient and inconsistent) Biden policies addressing the climate catastrophe if they'll be reversed with the next guy? You think four years of first boxing them through, to have them in place, more or less, just to be ended right away, will have made a dent?

As handicapped and as late as Harris' campaign thus was, it was nothing close to a 'good' one. Democratic strategist James Carville pointed out what had arguably been the most overtly disastrous moment of the campaign, which arose when Harris was asked whether she'd do something that would distinctively divert from Biden's policies, and she replied that she couldn't think of anything.[196] Arguably the by far weakest moment in her political life.
I think her Vice President pick wasn't much better, meanwhile, and here I'd probably have the entire Democratic party against me. Because we all like Tim Walz, don't we. I'm sure he's a great guy. A good man. Let's see.

When Biden – finally – dropped out, a campaign within the campaign started. It was the Get to Know Kamala campaign.[197]
Sorry, what?
It might be hard to comprehend, but then again, I don't know all the lawmakers of my own country. One would think that the citizens of the United States were familiar with their Veep, and not only after what has arguably been the funniest small screen series about the topic in history.[198] I'm not sure how much I can buy into the regular feature on Jimmy Kimmel's show when his cousin or somebody asks L.A. pedestrians the sort of gotcha questions you'd expect everyone to answer correctly since you can answer them as a non-U.S. citizen from across the pond, because you never

193 The whole debate, knock yourself out if you must:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sSfIeIuO3Z8

194 https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/article/2024/jul/13/trump-rally-gun-shots-pennsylvania

195 https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/jan/19/joe-biden-had-one-job-and-he-failed
I'd also recommend this Today in Focus episode featuring Mehdi Hassan on Trump's first 100 days in office:
https://www.theguardian.com/news/audio/2025/apr/30/mehdi-hasan-trump-first-100-days-podcast

196 James Carville:
https://www.youtube.com/shorts/eq_scvEzX20

197 Although Stephen Colbert puts a positive spin on it, apparently there wasn't enough to know for many voters to make up their minds just as positively:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=6krLggTyfm4

198 Veep, 2012 – 2019, created by Armando Iannucci

know how many well-informed Americans they've ticked off before presenting you with the astonishingly ignorant ones.[199]
But apparently Harris needed a recognition round, people were to see who she is, what her platform was, how she'd be as a president. Impressions matter greatly.
While this was under way, she made her Veep pick, and it was the Governor of Minnesota, Tim Walz.
Sorry, who?
There are some U.S. governors even we over here know, California Governor Gavin Newsom, Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer (hey, I even know of Michigan AG Dana Nessel, but that's because she's awesome). Tim Walz, no, first time I'd heard of him, and it would appear the same went for many Americans.
So we now had a Get to Know Kamala and Tim campaign within the campaign.

Trump, meanwhile, didn't have *that* problem. He could have picked Rumpelstiltskin for his running mate.[200] It was all about him and always had been. And at this point there's not a soul on the planet above the age when expressing yourself only with 'doo-da-da' who doesn't know who Donald Trump is.

Towards the end it was a choice between Walz and Pennsylvania Governor Al Shapiro, and given how little time was left it was partly about help to get either state. Shapiro would have been no doubt an able Vice President, but there was the ballast of the rift between the common man and the well- and expensively educated lawyer. Hence the focus on Tim Walz' 'folksiness'. So, delivering Minnesota for Harris it was.
But there wasn't just Shapiro as an alternative.
Arizona Senator Mark Kelly was on the top of the list of contenders along with Shapiro and Walz.[201]
I could be called biased because Kelly was an astronaut and I have a thing for astronauts, and I'm unashamed about it, and there's a reason why I think that fact would have been an asset, but there's more.
To start with, no Get to Know Mark campaign would have been necessary. Say about the Americans what you want, but they do appreciate their heroes, and they do appreciate their astronauts. America *knows* Mark Kelly, no introduction necessary, and if there had been, specially for Jimmy Kimmel's more ignorant pedestrians, say, saying 'you know, the astronaut,' would have done it.
Before NASA Kelly had a distinguished career in the Navy. He's known for speaking his mind, for even getting angry, for being able and willing to get into a diplomatic fight. He's well liked by most Arizonans. And he's well respected, and this so across the aisle. Which is an important factor, and it transcends into the electorate. He's able to work and build with Republican colleagues.

Let's not forget, the Vice President is in the end the person who'd take over the presidency should the actual President become incapacitated or die. The 2nd in line.
With all respect to Governor Walz, but his 'folksiness' ended up being put on a little too thickly, it soon felt contrived, and as that it came across as awkward and cringe-worthy. It was hard to imagine him as the 2nd in line, and it didn't help that he'd been rather obscure until then.
Kelly would have been familiar, respected, hard to assail, and projecting competence and confidence, projecting real authority.

---

199 I picked 'Can You Name *A* Country', but there are many :
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kRh1zXFKC_o
And one more, since it's so wonderfully depressing:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=umpalMtQE50

200 And it would appear that he did.

201 https://www.reuters.com/world/us/harris-interviews-walz-kelly-shapiro-her-home-vice-president-pick-2024-08-04/

But – Walz was at least in part picked to deliver Minnesota. By the way, how's *that* coming along?[202]

Impressions do matter in an election, and that isn't at all wrong. Biden's die hard conviction he could take on and beat Trump was on clear display as being a delusion when in the debate with him he came out as the incoherent one. Voters tend to vote on an impression of strength, and in this debate anyone would have seemed strong compared to Biden.
At the same time the impression of Donald Trump as an incompetent, bungling criminal with a much too feeble understanding of basic facts to run a country isn't a recent revelation either. But recall the first days of his first term, the voices calling for 'giving him a chance'.[203] The voices of those desperately trying not to believe that what they saw was what it was.
Clearly an impression can be valued in different ways, too. What repels some people about Trump is exactly what makes his supporters vote for him. Quite often you may be able to tell how a relationship is going to go and end, your own or a friend's, by looking at the partner's friends, or at least by seeing how you'll get along. Almost always a lot is to be learned from how your social environment reacts to mistakes you make, to wrongful accusations or in matters of dispute between you and another party. Will the people around you take sides? Will they jump into conclusions before knowing all the facts? Will they keep a distance, just to be on the safer side? Will they, in other words, wittingly or not, turn into the court of public opinion for whom due process doesn't exist, and for whom the defendant is always guilty until proven innocent?
You are allowed to fell judgement over how people vote when what they're voting for violates the basic principles that make coexistence possible, including the right to vote. Turns out that those who do tend to jump into conclusions before acquiring sufficient information, those who rather quickly turn away, those who see guilty verdicts before a trial also tend to be extremists when it comes to voting. Whom they're voting for says something about people. And also what on.

That is by no means a signature only of the far right. It's not even really a signature of any particular location on the circle. It's a signature of too many of us being voting extremists by way of ignorance.
This recent U.S. election was a prime example of how wrong single-issue voting can go, and there was one particular single issue that stood out when it came to the protest votes.

In the run-up to the election the number one issue that crystallised into additional headaches for the Democrats was Gaza. In the eyes of the people who'd been out on the streets on behalf of the Palestinians under bombardment Biden had done little if anything to stop Netanyahu's campaign in Gaza, and they were about to punish him for it, him for as long as he was still running, and the Democratic party as such. Harris' 'can't think of anything' certainly didn't help.
The pro-Palestine campaigners and protesters had three ways of doing this, either by not voting, by launching a spite vote for Trump, or by voting for a third party. The options for way three were theologian Cornel West and Green Party leader Jill Stein. Neither West nor Stein had even the remotest chance of winning the White House, which meant their main effect would be to syphon off votes from either of the two parties who could.

---

202 Actually, Harris & Walz did win Minnesota, by just over 5 points:
https://www.sos.mn.gov/elections-voting/election-results/2024/2024-general-election-results/
How much did it change?

203 Among those voices was Matthew McConaughey's -
https://edition.cnn.com/2017/02/02/entertainment/matthew-mcconaughey-trump/index.html
I picked him because I value him high as an actor, and I'd always prefer to have a debate with someone I don't agree with. I wonder how he thinks about Trump now. The whole point of this little essay is me saying, no, we should *not* have given him the chance.

Democratic Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez made an urgent point of this, reminding everyone that Stein swings by every election cycle to effectively boycott elections, and without any political work done to show in the meantime, including to grow her party as a leader.[204]
Given both West's and Stein's pro-Palestine stance it could be expected that the syphoning would be done on expense of the Democrats this year.

Several media outlets conducted talks with U.S. voters who had an iron in that fire, be it because they had family members in the region or because they had emigrated from there, among them the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, the CBC.[205] These talks were meant for the voters interviewed, not as confrontational exchange of opinions, which is a shame. We tend to people who more or less share our world views, I don't know how exposed these interviewees were to moderating opinions, whether there was anyone in their lives who could have pointed out the insanity they were about to commit.
I'd like to lay this out in detail as a side-by-side comparison, because it's such an important issue, and serves here as a clarifying example.

First the fantasy, Harris winning the election.
For those who indeed needed a Get to Know Kamala campaign, she was the Vice President, and only she'll know how many times her Sue answered her with 'No'. Being Veep made her part of Biden's cabinet, but with the least political power of them all. The Vice President is the 2nd in line of the presidency, other than that her/his role is largely ceremonial, unless it's to vote when there's a stalemate on the Hill.[206]
How much did she identify with Biden's Israel/Palestine politics? In our fantasy we'd find out, but for that she first needed the mandate. Uncertain, undecided voters and protest voters breaking with the Democrats on this might have heard 'I can't think of anything' the clearest, but she also said 'I will not be silent' in reference to Gaza.[207] And *that* is what's known as a *campaign promise*.
It's also a promise that should have been seen in the light of there being more Democrats who regularly spoke of the plight of the people of Gaza than Republicans.

What if she'd won the presidency and not come through on this promise? We should remind ourselves that with most leaders in democratic nations we often tend to forget that we might get angry with them for them precisely *not* being what we *don't* want them to be, namely dictators. An opposition in place might prevent you from realising a change in policy, so the failure is one of not having reached a compromise.
Either way, if those voters who'd have elected her on this promise before anything else had found themselves disappointed, there'd have been a number of avenues open to them.
They could have protested, for starters, organising large scale protests, and many of them. The 1st Amendment of the Constitution gives them that right. They could have contacted their elected officials, by means of letters, e-mails, in person, leaning in on them. They could have used a number of outlets to fan out the campaign of protest, online, writing in at newspapers, appearing on news outlets as organisers. And they could have taken it to the next step, running for an office. Campaigning for a seat in the House of Representatives. Remember, it's (supposed to be) an equal

204 https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2024/sep/18/green-party-jill-stein-election
A clip of Ocasio-Cortez further down the article.

205 CBC, Why anger over the Middle East could cost Democrats the U.S. election:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K5SOtHpRsMM
The CBC would return to Dearborn, Michigan after the election, see →214

206 Another good example of the Vice President's role becoming more important is when a VP decides to actually do his job even when under pressure not to, as was the case with VP Pence on January 6th.

207 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4mluJMxIDO8

branch of government, and particularly on the Democratic side of the aisle the chamber is filled with young talent, and they have made a difference.

None of these avenues are as satisfying as the punch of a protest vote, granted. All of them take time, as most things do in politics. But all of it would have been available, and under a President Harris none of these options would have been denied to the respective activists.

Now the present reality, and the first thing that must be said is that nothing about it is a surprise, and all of it should have been on the minds of those considering a protest vote against Harris.
Trump had been clear and outspoken about his views on the war in Gaza. 'Do what you have to do,' he told Netanyahu.[208] Should that not be clear enough to anyone, it translates into, 'go ahead, bomb the shit out of them'. That was long before Trump's idea to clear out the survivors and build a sea front resort.[209]
Some people's impression is often that the whole region houses only Muslims. Not true, but when it comes to Gaza the predominant religion certainly is Islam (not forgetting that there are various, sometimes warring factions within the religion), and it certainly is Hamas' religion. Trump is not exactly known for having a weak spot for people of this faith. During his first term he was the president who had an effective Muslim-ban imposed, restricting entry for nationals from countries where the religion dominates.[210]
Has a ceasefire been reached after Trump became president? Yes. Has the bombing continued? Also. It was not a deal designed to give the people of Gaza much hope in any case, and Trump's position seems to be in favour of resettling them permanently, without much planning because without any concern, and also largely without asking anyone in whose sovereign countries these new settlements would be situated.[211]
Before October 7th Netanyahu had been in trouble. Large scale demonstrations, a huge percentage of Israelis wanting him gone.[212] Wars have a way to rally the people behind their leaders, remember George W. Bush? But this didn't go as far with the people of Israel, many of whom have wanted the war to end for long, who didn't want this extent to begin with, and who still want Netanyahu gone. Fat chance with an ally like the United States under Trump. For now, with Trump having his back, Netanyahu is there to stay.

So already we see it's infinitely worse with Trump in the Oval than it would have been with Harris, and again, all of it should have been known beforehand.
So what about those avenues, the same avenues disappointed Harris critics could have answered her 'betrayal' with had she not fulfilled her campaign promise?
Well.

You could demonstrate. I wouldn't recommend it, not as a pure pro-Palestine demo. I mean, people currently do demonstrate all over the country, but those demonstrations are aimed at the whole volume of policies speak offences unleashed by the Trump administration, and they're big, a lot of

---

208 https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2024/10/25/trump-netanyahu-support-gaza-lebanon/

209 https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/feb/05/waterfront-property-what-are-trumps-real-estate-interests-in-palestine
https://www.reuters.com/world/us/trumps-gaza-riviera-echoes-kushner-waterfront-property-dreams-2025-02-05/

210 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Executive_Order_13769

211 https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/may/19/benjamin-netanyahu-israel-take-control-gaza-uk-france-canada-threaten-action

212 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2023_Israeli_judicial_reform_protests

people are pouring into the streets. It's the so far most hopeful sign, along with the abysmal polling numbers.
But don't be overcome with optimism yet. Take the steps this administration has taken seriously, they're the unmistakable steps to be taken when power is to be consolidated, and an autocracy will count with protest, intent on not caring. At first.
If you organise a pure pro-Palestine protest now, red-black-white-green flags and all, you might get yourself in trouble rather quickly. University students who've partaken in such demonstrations and activism *have* already been arrested for their role in such protest.[213] The next step could be to decree any such protests illegal (including the protests now) and send in the police if this decree is being violated, or the national guard, or the military. Trump has already floated the idea of deporting U.S. citizens, and that despite the enormous backlash his administration is facing over the deportation of non-citizens without due process they alleged to be criminals. You could find yourself arrested, you could find yourself deported. The reason given? Pick one. How about for being 'anti-American'?

Arguably, Trump doesn't even have to do any of that. All he has to do is to make sure that the word's spreading, all the way to the ears of the recently pardoned. No police, no national guard, no military necessary, and the people who'd volunteer to come to bash you around the head, to them you already are 'un-American'. And they'd sure bring their guns.
If Trump pardoned them after they staged an insurrection attempt at the Capitol, what makes you so sure they'd not come with anything but a feeling of impunity?

So, no, wouldn't recommend. Protesting. What about other forms of activism, online, as a pundit on networks, writing? Sure, and it's happening. Until they begin to shut that down, too. Perhaps targeting the respective network for allowing you on the show. Don't think that Trump wouldn't love to do that. He's called the free press the 'enemy of the people', at least the press that doesn't serve as his megaphone. Has called for revoking licenses.

So you might run for an office. Try and become a Congressperson. Good luck. If they don't manage to prevent you from even running, let alone winning a seat, you're by no means safe. U.S. American politicians are no longer safe, as Governor Shapiro is only the latest to confirm, not even if you're a Republican, unless you keep your trap shut. Their Democratic counterparts keep confirming what their Republican colleagues are whispering, it's no longer primarily about the fear of not being re-elected.

After the election some of the same teams re-visited the voters who'd intended to vote for either no one or a third party, or even for Trump, over the Gaza issue.[214] One of them asked, 'where was your voice against the killing?' Another, who'd been an avid campaigner, announced, filled with energy and purpose, and what weirdly looked like optimism, how she would continue the fight, organize against Trump just as they had against the Harris campaign.

Wouldn't she have liked to continue it under somewhat easier circumstances? If these voters wanted to make a point, they sure did, but what exactly was it? To punish the Democrats. On whose behalf? The people they claimed to care most about? By making everything worse for them? By making things worse for their fellow activists at home? By making it worse for themselves?

The problem with single issue-voting like this is that's it's all about ideology, not common sense. I was about to type 'blind ideology', but for me that'd be a redundant prefix. The point that was being

213 https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/may/17/trump-effort-deport-pro-palestinian-students

214 The CBC team returning to Dearborn, Michigan, after the election -
CBC, They helped Trump win to get a ceasefire in Gaza. What do they think now?:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jS13FN7CkBM

made here was a stubborn, blind, static and utterly counter-productive one. And in the face of everything that was obvious. Much of what I described above has already come true, much of what we're witnessing today would have been among the list of predictions I'd offered had I been in one of those meetings as organised by those news outlets.
And yet the activists in question are undeterred. I'd grant them that it's a defence mechanism. We don't want to admit when we're wrong. We don't want to admit having done something – stupid? And keep in mind: we're still talking about only this single one single issue.

I do have one request for these protest voters. After all this, and when you find yourself in the thick of this reality, when you find your liberties cut, when you find your constitutional rights trampled, when you find yourself or your friends arrested, if all this comes after you sticking it to the Democrats, do me, do the world a favour: don't ask for sympathy.
You certainly won't get mine. You won't get it, because not only have you done this to yourself and the people you care about, and not only have you done this to the rest of America, you've done this to the rest of the world.

As heavy as this issue is, it wasn't the only one on the ballot. And even this matter you haven't helped, you only *could* have made it worse this way, and on the back of this inevitable outcome you've jeopardised the hope for a more favourable outcome pertaining every other subject of importance. I cannot repeat this often enough, if Trump and his cronies manage to complete the process of turning the U.S. into an autocratic nation, then we'll have the three superpowers all being tyrannies, plus others, and there'll be no easy way back from there, certainly no fast one, and perhaps *none at all*. Along with the geopolitical turmoil, no doubt resulting in more wars, quite possibly here in Europe, the efforts to contain the ongoing climate catastrophe already appears largely on hold, a hold we *cannot* afford. If nothing else gets your brain started on this, focus on temperatures - last summer there were spots in southern Europe reaching nearly, some even indeed 50°C (122°F). Newsflash: 50° is too hot for the human body. And the trend is *up*. We're looking at a *near* future when people in formerly moderately tempered regions won't be able to leave their homes during the day in the summer, and with people who don't have air-conditioning dying inside those homes.

I don't have the inside on the exact numbers, and your protest vote didn't do it alone, but the race was much closer than initially reported, it wasn't the landslide Trump claimed, and there had been a chance to avert this. And your protest vote, even if it didn't go directly to Trump, certainly contributed.

All that said, the single issue vote as such can be a scourge. The only single issue that counted in this election was a conglomerate, one that had many issues embedded, and they all combined to the single rock called Prevent Trump. It may be added to what Mehdi Hasan identified as Biden's one job where the election was concerned. It was also the voters' one job.
With all the things that had been at stake, people did vote on single issues because they always do. Predominantly the issues that regard them personally. The realists among the strategists aren't wrong to focus on them where those issues are so pressing for the individual. 'It's the economy, stupid,' as James Carville is so often quoted saying.[215] And the housing crisis, as part of it. And immigration. I wish we'd say, 'it's Earth's habitability, stupid.'

But it's one thing for strategists. It's one thing for what politicians on the campaign trail should say and what not. It's another when thinking about how this translates for an entire people when things are glaringly obvious. Not even just where it's about Trump. Consider what's entailed when politicians say things like, 'the people are hurting' when they mean we have to listen and

215 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/It's_the_economy%2C_stupid

understand why half of the citizens would go for a demagogue, why for roughly half of them any change seems to be a preferable option, *any* change, let's see what'll happen. 'The people are hurting, and that's why.'
You sure? That really the only reason, the one, inevitably conclusive reason? What *are* you saying? That those citizens who'll vote Democrat are all super-well off Hollywood types spending their mornings and afternoons sipping cocktails at their pools? They're living with the same pains as the other half they're so divided from. The same economic hardships of rising rents, rising cost of living, student debts, the same American Dream that keeps forever receding on the horizon.
Of course it's the economy, stupid, stupid. In part. As a fully satisfying explanation it really doesn't cut it, though.
That is to say, it certainly is an impactful aspect. The elected dictators regularly pick the moment, and economic stress is a historically well documented fertile field preceding authoritarians. Not the only one, whatever the fascist in question may find to exploit will do, take Nigel Farage's Reform UK's recent successes.[216] The same question simply arises, why these guys, these voters, and not those? Or rather, it is really this that is the question, not whatever grievance is being weaponised.

Every single issue we pick as the thing we vote on is in essence like the Gaza-single issue. We make hobby-horses of our pet peeves. We infuse ideology if it's not already born from it. We surrender a chunk of our identity to this ideology, even where it's amorphous, where we couldn't really put it in words, much less a coherent argument, even where it's fantasy.
It's a way to blind ourselves, a voluntary tunnel vision, focus on that one thing, that one issue, your issue, that way forget the big picture. And blame and pay back those who didn't care enough about your issue. Whether it's the idea of a deep state you bought, the real fact that your food is too expensive, or Gaza.

In a way control is in the end about censorship. We see censorship in the banning of books, but we don't predominantly use that word when people are being detained for their political views. We also don't use it when someone is being shut up for having a different opinion, when we ask for them being fired or have an award stripped off, instead of debating them, trying to change their opinion, or expose ourselves to the possibility of having ours changed. Like with those 'alternative facts' the far right has plenty to copy from the left, and it does. When you don't want to engage with those who differ from you on pronouns or gender identity and call for their removal, you're doing the same as a government that locks away an activist or protester, the only difference is that you don't have ICE or a police force to put cuffs on them. And if you fear an opinion can be used in an harmful way by others you must be thinking that those intending it this way haven't already made up their minds, and you forget that it's the same argument used by those in power.
The problem isn't differing opinions, even where the other opinion appears outrageous or even damaging to you. We have debates over matters of life and death, and we used to be able to conduct them with civility. So it's not about those opinions, unless they directly call for harm. It's about how we engage with and treat another. It's about basic civility.
If you think about the people still on the fence over an issue, remind yourself of that. Who could possibly sit on the fence when it's about civility and good behaviour? As long as that's applied, opinions are for debate. It's where that ends that censorship begins.
Remind yourself also about your example easily ending up as ammunition used by your opponents should you have been the one calling for censorship. If you really have it'll be difficult if not impossible to counter your opponent.

---

216 https://www.theguardian.com/politics/audio/2025/may/05/farage-here-to-stay-the-local-elections-that-changed-everything-politics-weekly-westminster
Nigel Farage is Britain's poorest sod's Trump, if you will. Just as with Trump everything ought to be clear to you by exposing your innocent brain to 1 or 2 minutes of him talking, by having a glance at his policies, or by simply having a look at the guy.

But of course there's the voters who do ask for it, directly. For censorship. For authority deciding it. I wonder. Is it this the people mean who keep shouting the word freedom the loudest? The freedom to be relieved of power, of *decisions*? Of having to understand things to begin with? Of having to do the homework? Why else would it be so often the people using the word *freedom* to excess who're the first to be willing to give it up? Who'll vote their dictator into office?
The first freedoms to fall are those of the others. Not of the followers. The followers' freedoms you'll chip away at, you'll ease them in, you prepare them by renaming the brand, you prime them by getting them used to the idea that language doesn't matter, so when you announce 'Freedom Day' it won't be about them having to tighten their belts and spend their vacation at home, it's gonna be about to get even with other nations that have been the ones exploiting you. Nothing easier than presenting an enemy far from home, way easier than explaining world economy to someone for whom the world is the greatest country in it. What you think they gonna gobble up, the economist's textbook or the bait?
And there's that. It's amazing what you can get people to accept as long as you can keep them happy by telling them they're exceptional.

But they're not happy. You can dig into that, too. Make it the message, something they can relate to, something they feel, and it's even way more horrible than they think. Finally someone who understands, even if we don't. Finally someone who talks bluntly. And who offers us the solution, and it's a simple solution, for us simple folks, for us simple species, and the story got a culprit, it's got a devil, it's got an enemy, it's got leeches, and would you know it, the leeches and the solution, it's one and the same, get rid of the leeches.
It's the same story again and again. There's always someone who has to pay.
Trump delivers. Plenty of parties to pay. You'll need plenty for all those grievances. There's other countries to start with. Not the like-minded leaders, it goes without saying. I get the feeling for those MAGA supporters who stand behind Trump's tariff obsession it's not even about that. It's about the easy target. Someone is always responsible, and for those for whom that's not specific enough, it's someone *else*. I also get the feeling that there's a bit of shame-avoidance in the mix. Imagine what would happen if, after all this time, after the long way we've walked with him, we'd come to admit to ourselves that we've been wrong about the guy? That he isn't the genius business man who understands it so much better, certainly so much better than we do?

While you're posing our former allies as the bad guys, you got plenty more at home. Trump had called immigrants 'rapists and murderers' from the start, already before his first term (seriously, what did you think was gonna happen?), so they're to be viewed as criminals before proven innocent, naturally, including children fighting cancer.[217] And plenty more. The Democrats, the woke liberals, the judges trying to prevent him from cleaning up America. One of the latest, and it's almost as if they dare us to make the comparisons, Trump has begun calling judges 'communists'.[218]
How far can I go? Until even the last of my supporters will finally start to hesitate?
Apparently very far. All the way to the end, as far as his hardcore base is concerned. A cult works the same way as a fascist party. Let the leader think and act for you, and the cruelty will be vicarious, it's done in your name, but not by yourself.
And the 'best' thing about all of this, it cuts through the fibres and sinews of the nation and the world with more than one edge. It has been noticed that in the first 100 days of Trump's new administration that same administration has barely passed any laws. No, but an unprecedented

217 https://edition.cnn.com/2025/04/27/us/children-us-citizens-deported-honduras

218 https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/apr/30/president-trump-administration-news-updates-today

number of executive orders. Which Trump evidently sees as decrees. Including decrees that are illegal, that clash with the Constitution.
Do his followers care? Of course not. The luxury of not having to decide, of not having to understand.
The sheer flurry of these orders and draconic and law-violating acts have meanwhile also the benefit of distracting from those meant to slip in under the radar.[219] It's a welcome side effect, straight out of the play book. They also enrage those he wants to see enraged, and finally, all this continues to be a tremendous ego-boost. Trump is now on the record saying that this time around he rules America, and he rules the world, reflecting on how he's sent the nations scrambling. The worst thing about this, he's not completely wrong. No matter how short-lived the high will be, no matter how destructive the influence, it's a high.

But we shouldn't let one culprit off the hook. The people. The public. The voters. Just as the news- and commentary networks had at first numbed themselves into treating Trump's election win as, yes, terrifying, but still news business as usual, talking about 'the coming four years', those voters who chose him because they wanted something different, who wanted to try him over the Democrats with whom they were disillusioned, or who contributed to having him elected by voting for Stein or West or not at all, they also refused to even look into the direction of the big picture, it should have been just as obvious to them, and yet it wasn't. It couldn't have been, because if you still believe that what counts most is your pet-issue you clearly don't see. It was barely believable the first time around. The second time cannot be forgiven.

The same blindness was already in play the first time around. 'Give him a chance,' as could be heard at the start. You're missing the point. The point is, no, *don't* give him a chance. You give him a chance, and you'll have what we got now, and you may end up with all *your* chances being taken from you.
And the truth is that the first failure in the institutions of the United States lay already with the possibility of such a man. Of the praised and priced provision that really *anybody* could become president (at least anybody with enough financial backing). We've learned the hard way that this isn't such a good idea. It doesn't only concern the presidency. Matt Gaetz, Marjorie Taylor Greene, Lauren Boebert, only some of those who shouldn't be allowed anywhere near public office. Taylor Greene, who stalked the survivor of a school shooting.[220] Never mind the utter incompetence, but the sheer vitriol and nastiness.
Trump should have never been enabled to run. The avenue should not have been and should not be available to him. There is something profoundly un-adult in allowing this, in insisting on the literalness of the availability of public office for everyone. An important part of being an adult is to be able to distinguish. We do it elsewhere. We screen and we evaluate people before allowing them into certain jobs. Why not this one? If such guardrails aren't in place we sure can't hope that the voters will take care of it. Evidently they won't.

You listen five minutes to the man, you take one good look at him, and the matter should be decided. No. It's nothing to do with issues. It's *not* the economy. Most certainly not the second time round. It's the Stupid, stupid.

---

219 Rachel Maddow's radar works just fine, though:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i29JtdyhO4s
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1CCoZ0Zlz9k

220 Taylor Greene stalking David Hogg:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eCSoLCmJwOs

Right now there's signs of hope. Some say. Some say it's in the approval ratings, or rather the disapproval ratings, Trump's are in the record low, they're abysmal, and if we know one thing about the man, it's that he lechers after approval. Good ratings are his substitute for love.

You also may see hope in people possibly turning away from Trump in greater numbers now due to the mind-boggling incompetence of this administration, Trump foremost, but also his cabinet. That people begin to see that all this nonsense and all this cruelty is not what they had voted for (those enabling Trump's return have, actually, but alright, they hadn't foreseen all *this*). The incompetence lies in the sheer avalanche of badness itself – you wanna do some dictatoring, maybe don't start with *all* the unpopular stuff.

Some see it in the protests, the most visual incarnation of those ratings. All over the country. But protests were to be expected. It's now a question how much Trump really cares about those. And how he will react to them, in action.
One of the sentences I heard this morning won't leave me. In the context of Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez rallying up the people, filling stadiums, it was said that neither the Legislative Branch nor the Judiciary will come to the rescue, and that it is up to the people.[221]
I think that's correct. But consider what you're saying. If the two other branches have failed, the checks and balances have failed, and so much we can say is now the case. The constitutional crisis is upon us. But if it is now left to the people it inevitably follows from there that this is about direct confrontation. It's about whether Trump will care about the will of these people, whether he will see it as anything he needs. Or whether he'll react with force. Which would mean that it won't really be left to the people. It'll be left to those meant to enact this force. The police, the National Guard, the military.

Which is what this period, this moment may ultimately come down to.
Mehdi Hasan distinguishes between hope and optimism. I understand what he means. And you know what they say. Hope for the best, and…

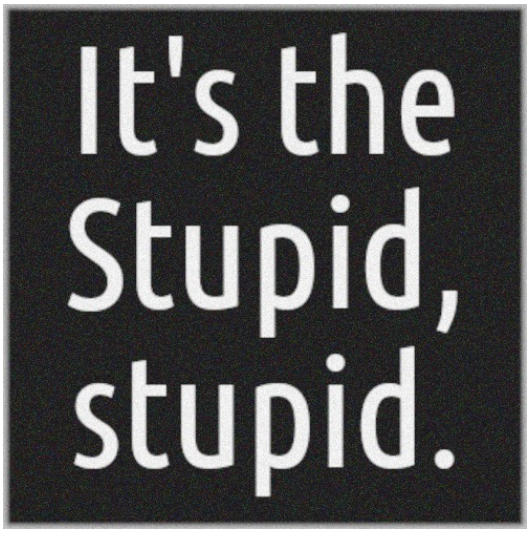
A few last-minute links here.
Some may think I'm a little harsh on the public, if so it stems from the frustration over seeing *the people* being let off the hook again and again. The tendency of brushing off responsibilities and treating them as something solely vicariously owned by our political representatives (whom we elect) to whom we leave the thinking until it's time to complain is an easy way out that's not alone a right-voter vice. Not to mention the blind vote for the extreme out of frustration with the status quo. And it's not restricted to the U.S., alas. Listen to the voting choice of this Doncaster resident, for example - *'Reform all the way.'* Why? *'We need something different. Should be given a chance. Can't be worse than…'*:
https://www.theguardian.com/politics/audio/2025/apr/30/reform-all-the-way-on-the-road-in-doncaster-politics-weekly-uk

Meanwhile, what is it with the gullible and pizza? An example for how sinister this can go -
NJ Judge: My murdered son's name was on pizzas sent to intimidate other judges:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l_XIsjx2Z7Y

After the first Trump election Stephen King had a few things to say how the results had actually been predictable just judging from the climate:
https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/apr/01/stephen-king-on-donald-trump-fictional-voters-truth-about-us-election

221 Mehdi Hasan on the Guardian's Today in Focus podcast, see →195

I’m not quite sure, though, that the truth-serum thought experiment in the latter half of this piece would yield similar results. I think everyone who tried it with truth minus the serum will agree.



10. Evil

If, like me, you’re a news junkie and start your day with an update on the story of humanity on Earth since last time you’ve been conscious, there’ll be no shortage of reports on and analysis of atrocities. When hearing the details, those that are known, of the RSF’s attack on Zamzam, a city-size refugee camp, the killings, the rapes, the burning of housing, the expulsions, the deliberate exposure of masses of people to death by starvation, death by thirst, death by heat and exhaustion, all of which entails an ethnic component, you’ll get the sense that the reporters, too, sense that any background explanation of tactics and objectives are much more background than explanation. The term ‘senseless killing’ will inevitably turn up.[222]

‘The cruelty is the point’, that term again you will have heard a number of times in connection to the Trump administration’s deportation measures, and you’ve already heard it during his first term when families were deliberately separated, with some children not knowing the whereabouts of their parents to this day.
It is in general the point of atrocities, of course, and when you’ll then return to the question of objectives as relating to *the point* you’ll re-enter the same circle of hell. Our thoughts may be turned back to the terrors of old, Attila the Hun, Genghis and Kublai Khan, and you’ll emerge at the word *reputation*. Establish a reputation of being fear incarnated, your enemies will tremble before they even see you on the battlefield, that’s a huge step towards winning that battle. Precisely the reputation of the bully. Precisely what makes the terror of old a terror that’s never ceased, a terror that’s being deployed now as then. And it still leaves you with the question, given that there are alternatives to the terror, alternatives to the cruelty, although admittedly they won’t normally result in a vast empire.

222 The Guardian’s Kaamil Ahmed on the attack on Zamzam:
https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2025/apr/18/survivors-attack-sudan-zamzam-camp-rapid-support-forces-paramilitaries
...and on Today in Focus:
https://www.theguardian.com/news/audio/2025/may/01/the-attack-on-zamzam-refugee-camp-and-what-it-means-for-the-sudan-war-podcast

Can we interpret the sentence, ‘the cruelty is the point’, in a different way, separate from the objectives? And is that where evil resides?

Let’s return to the extreme of serial killers for a moment. Popular fiction has provided us with a fragmented, perforated manual because we’re what Salman Rushdie has described as the story-telling animal, and we consume our fiction by relating to it, meaning that it only works for us as long as we’ll believe it. The grown-up extent is to believe the fiction *for as long* as you’re reading it, once you stop, once you lift your eyes from the book or screen you’re supposed to be back. Since the child in the adult is widely and overly present throughout the populus it doesn’t always go this smoothly, and by now we have a large percentage of those who watch and read serial killer fiction, as well as an unsettling number of non-fiction products that follow the same assumptions, believing this fractured manual.
Not wanting to get sidetracked and go into the many ‘rules’ that simply not apply, there’s one aspect here that’s rarely given enough attention, and that there’s essentially two kinds of serial killer. No, not the distinction between the sexually and the sadistically motivated perpetrator you might have heard about, and to which I object (‘sexual motivation’ doesn’t need to lead to penetration. They are *all* connected to sexuality, if you don’t believe it have a look at the victim’s *gender* – it’ll relate to the perp’s sexual orientation). No, it’s that some serial killers simply ‘slip’ into becoming killers from murder’s sibling-crime, rape.
I’m talking specifically murders with a self-gratifying motive, there are other types of murders I can understand, there are types of murders for which I see mitigating circumstances, e.g. the murder of one’s rapist. There are *no* mitigating circumstances for rape. I call rape a slow murder. It might not kill you right away (though it *can*). But your life will have been damaged to the point of destruction. Trauma translates as *perpetual stress*, besides drawing a whole array of mental consequences also being detrimental to your health on the whole, thus already potentially shortening your life through comorbidities. That is if you’re not being killed in delay: suicide.
On top of that rapists are by overwhelming tendency serial offenders, too. If you catch a one-time rapist and keep him incarcerated you won’t know whether he would not have become a serial rapist with one more victim alone (or indeed whether he hadn’t done it before). That alone closely relates the rapist to any self-gratifying murderer in my mind.
While the serial killer in the public mind is driven by a sum of factors originating in something else than plain sexual disturbance and result in a respectively specific pathology, and while we indeed know of plenty of such killers, there are also those who’re quite simply rapists. The step from rape to murder is disquietingly small. The number of missing indigenous women on the North American continent, by far not all of whom are found, does not fit the statistics of serial killers as emerging as numbers, at least not for the serial killers fed by our imagination. But when certain thresholds are removed, when, say, a victim’s ethnicity results in less enthusiastically conducted investigations compared to other ethnicities, and when the reason for that can also be found in the attitude of a significant percentage of the population, you will end up with rapists not only sharing this attitude, namely that the victim is a person of lesser value, but exploiting both the racism in the population and in the to be expected investigation. The first murder will then be committed for purely strategic reasons, to remove what is it once the number one witness and the number one body of evidence, the victim. For someone capable of doing that the murder will become part of the ritual with victim number two.
The twist here is that if I’d leave it with qualifying the first rape-murder (before it begins to become ritualistic part) as a strategic means as if I’d be describing the most sensible way of going about cleaning your gutter, I’d be completely ignoring the equally pathologic intention that has led to the strategy’s objective, namely the desire to rape another human being. A result of attempting to clinically assess something that isn’t easily quantifiable.

The word itself is useful. We have no other word for what it is meant to describe, but defining it, narrowing its choice, isn’t easy. Is the Joker evil? Does one *become* evil? Presumably, we aren’t

born evil children, the cruelty dealt between children notwithstanding. Is being evil surrendering to our baser instincts? But our instincts are nature, and nature itself isn't evil.
It is easier for the church, they simply have it personified and be the root of all of itself as this entity, basically having it whisper into our ears, we're still guilty, since we decide to give into this voice, it's what counts as free will in religion. How much sense this ultimate scapegoat makes I'll leave to you, you won't actually find that many horrific deeds for which the devil is blamed in the Bible, the first terrible thing is the serpent promoting knowledge, terrible, isn't it, in between demons are said to possess a few folks, and things get rather muddled at the end, with no one actually agreeing who or what the Beast is. Then again, it isn't even certain that the early appearing serpent is the devil.[223] Compare these puny acts with some of the things God pulls, Adam and Eve gain knowledge, the punishment is exile from the garden and Eva having to go through agony just to give birth from now on. Later God sees that his creation doesn't quite behave the way he likes, and in a celestial hissy fit he kills *everyone*, not just all humans, but all creatures large and small, except for a small handful *very* much crammed on a boat. Granted, he feels bad about it and won't do it again, so the city of debauchery is nuked without the rest of the world having to pay for it, and in a shameless act of plagiarism Lot's wife is being turned into a goat magnet for, right, just for looking. Thou shalt not kill, unless it's this or that group, because, you know, that's different. And if at the end of the day or days you are not a believer you'll not be saved and can roast along with the rest for what'll feel like eternity because it is, no matter how good a person you've been.
Hell, by the way, had never been mentioned until Jesus came along.

So it's good that we have divorced the word from religious undertones, since no church and no religion seems to be the best authority on the subject, anyway.
And we use it when it's about geopolitics as well. 'The axis of evil', for example. And what was the axis of evil? The term was coined for the trifactor of Hitler's Germany, Mussolini's Italy and Hirohito's Japan. The three fascist nations threatening the world, never mind that there was already one dictator among the eventual allies, and that this dictator was only in with the whole allies-thing after another dictator with whom he'd made a pact had violated it.
Certainly the term was applicable for still more unholy fraternisations after World War II, and indeed it has been used. And in the light of what Anne Applebaum urgently tries to raise our awareness to, the term has not become redundant yet.

While you'll always find elements within an usurped country that will eagerly conform to the nastiness imposed by the invader, and while countries *under the influence*, so to speak, will happily apply the same tactics of oppression, axis nations, under the use, are generally the originators and facilitators, those with the greater influence. Hungary would have its own green shirts, but they needed the brown shirts to come first. You can hardly get any more evil than al-Assad's regime, but without Putin's assistance it would never have been this long-lasting. Between the nations and ideologies opinions will differ, but the most regularly named new axis of evil-contenders are Putin's Russia, Iran, North Korea (which has special status, it, too, wouldn't last much longer without powerful support from China, but on top of that it now has, well, nuclear weapons) and, with opinions being heated and much reservation, Xi's China. The relationship between Pakistan and India, and now newly brought to simmer with Modi's Hindu nationalist government, has them having the infamous Facebook entry on their axis-contender page.[224]

---

223 If you enjoy going down rabbit holes, try and obtain a comprehensive picture of the history of the devil. How did the idea come up, what old myths had been resorted to, what demons are also angels, and what angels are demons, and who is this devil-person, anyway? Bottomline, it's complicated. Quite.

224 We've just survived a very recent real boil in the relationship, as the latest open conflict threatened to escalate into a full-out war between the two nuclear-armed nations:
https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/may/12/how-india-and-pakistan-conflict-turned-from-brink-of-war-to-ceasefire-in-days
https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/may/12/india-paused-military-action-pakistan-narendra-modi

Notably, African nations usually won't find their way onto a prospective list of that kind, but then many people are so confused in so many ways when it comes to Africa. A number of the continent's nations have come to know evil all too well, and currently it's off all leashes in Sudan.
You could add more countries, of course, you could choose whether you apply the Applebaum notion of authoritarian country's tendency for collaboration, you could choose depending on their current leaders and their aspirations. A lot of people would add Israel, because of Netanyahu, but also because of the messianic settlers. There are still others who'd add Israel for more nauseating reasons.
There are also those who already *have* added the United States of America for quite some time. Without wanting to tar everyone with the same brush, but those are more often than not people who seem to feel they have to excuse other regimes in order to point at the U.S. as the bad guys who're responsible for all the evil in the world (and, since we're talking axis, NATO as such) – the compulsion to take one of only two sides, and to go absolute with it, is yet another symptom of infantility, comparing to the youngest generation let loose on Youtube who appear to think you *have* to click on either 'like' or 'dislike'. 'My enemy's enemy is my friend', appears to be the guiding proverb here. It's an *extremely* unwise idea to be made mantra.
The way it looks at the moment, those latter folks with the die-hard anti-American sentiment may finally, possibly, get their money's worth. The U.S. administration under Trump, if no effort, and I mean real effort is being made from within, is set to join this charming club of fiends.

You may now say, what's the point of this line of thought, we know, authoritarian systems are evil, horrible things are being committed by them. I point, pun intended, at one of the initial questions, posed as a reminder statement by media outlets, that none of this is normal.
I've argued that none of this is normal because wanting such a system isn't normal. Wanting this much power, wanting it to the extent of wanting to go through all these measures of oppression, isn't normal. Wanting to be a dictator isn't normal. Needless to say, wanting to *have* one isn't normal either.
So when people say, 'it's because he wants ultimate power' I say, duh. I don't yet have an explanation. Why would anyone want *that*? As said, it's not healthy. Not when measured by the effects (isolation, paranoia), and not when measured by the conditions that must be present for anyone desiring it.

It's not an explanation either, but the second interpretation of the sentence 'the cruelty is the point', besides the aspect of objective, of cruelty as a means to box the results through with little resistance due to fear, is of course cruelty as an end as well as a means. Both existing side by side perfectly simultaneously.
I've called Trump a sadist, it's been exhibited in person, and it's exhibited in the specific nature of measures, and it must be seen as an elementary component in totalitarian structures. Visible in all dictators, cultivated within the system, spread like pathogens to the last of the executioners where it awakens the already existing potential in those who harbour the receptors.
Evil as viral sadism.
You can go through your own check-list of dictators and see if this applies. The pompous bully-strongman will portray brutality as strength, but it'll always propagate as barbarism.

Trump's sadism is actually rather mundane, comparing to the simmering sadism of your mean neighbour, and to the variant known as sadistic voyeurism (all too widespread). Which is why it's so readily showing itself (Ali Velshi's knee-injury, the glee with which he experiences the distress of others). It's also not a sadism on which he himself would act personally – except in the case of rape. That is something he has in common with other dictators, too, though not all of them. Like many dictators he's a coward, and like all those who live out their sadistic tendencies vicariously, by means of a torturing apparatus of henchmen, he'd shy away from engaging in an act of physical

violence himself, with the exception of sexually assaulting women.[225] The vicarious way of exerting sadism is not only safer, it's also so much more effective. Whole swaths of people who can be tormented.

If you now say that Trump is not yet torturing anyone or has anyone tortured, firstly, Mr. Ábrego García would probably beg to differ, as would the deported children, second – be patient. You really think that, should he gets his way and be allowed to complete the process of fully establishing an authoritarian regime, he'd ever shy away from having sites opened for this purpose? The very country he wishes to be king of introduced 'enhanced interrogation' after 9/11 when it was *not* a totalitarian country (no matter what our friends on the far left will say).
And torture can be many things. The stresses put on everyone not conforming with the Trump administration's way and on those it doesn't deem welcome amount to torture. Imprisonment, while unavoidable in the cases of those we simply have to put away, is torture. And there should be no doubt that Trump wouldn't hesitate to go beyond that. There can be no doubt that Stephen Miller would.
In that context, you may also want to prepare yourselves for the return to nationwide capital punishment.

The poisonings of Alexei Navalny, Vladimir Kara-Murza and others were nothing short of being sadistic. Death by poison isn't mild, it's agonising. The choice of polonium-210 to kill Alexander Litvinenko was not only a sure way to kill, it was guaranteed to be a tormentous death. Russia's government *is* Putin, and it is likely that Putin also determined how these assassinations and attempts thereof would be conducted, and be it by saying, 'make it painful'. When you think of the dictator and the kill-order don't imagine it as the dictator coldly disregarding the death. See him as enjoying the thought of it.

What is evil?
Some say it lies in indifference, but I disagree. By that definition you could call nature evil, prey suffers an awful lot under the fangs and claws of the predator, go through mortal fear during the hunt. There's simply no provision in nature that would take care of that precisely because nature is utterly indifferent, because it is not a mind that could sympathise.
To meet the definition the act we want to call evil needs intent, one that isn't based on utter necessity for the sake of own survival. An intent follows a purpose, and if that purpose is something for which measures such as murder, rape and torture are the tools at disposal the intending mind must be of a particular make-up in order to walk the way. It must be wanting to do it.
Is sadism an elementary component of evil?
I think so. I'm thinking of all the times I've met it. I'm thinking of the times we've heard of it, or read about it. I'm thinking of a Russian soldier castrating a Ukrainian. I'm thinking of Russian soldiers burying a Ukrainian civilian in a vertical pipe, from where he was only rescued by Russian conscripts who'd observed the act and couldn't live with it. I'm thinking of the drunk Russian soldiers walking into the home of a Ukrainian couple, some of them taking the wife away to gang-rape her, the others mocking the husband, then shooting him in the groin before joining the others, finally all of them leaving, laughing as they did. Just three examples from one war.

The brutish dictator is more removed. But the same principle applies. In order to see to providing the grounds so such acts will be committed you'll have to welcome them. The same question again: why would anyone want to be a dictator? Knowing that to a lesser or worse extent it'll always go

225 The video showing Trump beating someone who's face had been replaced with the CNN logo at a wrestling match appears staged to me, a show fight just like this sort of wrestling: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=85Eu1heYpuc

this way? Knowing it'll costs lives, it'll cause people to be tortured. Knowing it's against the people one wants to rule instead of serving them. Thus knowing that it's *wrong*.

The answer is, legal sanity. The defendant knows his actions were wrong, he knows what they entailed, and yet he wanted to do them, and he was enriching him as he did, and he took steps to evade capture and prosecution. Meaning it weren't the voices, and he can't be treated with medication. He's responsible, he's *legally* sane.
And yet we look at this mind, we look at the megalomania, we look at the excesses of brutality, and we're having a real hard time to call all this sane while keeping a straight face.

All this applies to Trump and his goons, too. The easy way is to put it all down to the crime-factor, easy because it fits. Stripped of titles and the powers that come with a presidency, to be exerted also by those in close vicinity, whether they are part of that government or not, the Trump family is just a crime family. A family at the heart of a syndicate, and they're always hiring, and if the hire disappoints they'll dump them. Not exactly in the East River, but then they don't have to.
But this is a crime boss with more ambitions, with a greater pathologic complex, and a more severely affecting child sitting in that orange head of his.

What *were* you expecting.
Of all the looming dictatorships coming into power by way of an election, this would have been the easiest to prevent.

Epilogue – Everything Good

Think of everything good. The good that is and can be.

Your next door or upstairs neighbours dropping everything and giving you a hand. Your neighbours are gay, you are not, and neither you or them ever think about that when you talk. The whole house, the whole neighbourhood raises their hands when you need a babysitter short notice. Every once in a while there's a barbecue in someone's backyard, not always the same, or your apartment block's backyard, and you're always invited, even though you can't contribute, you're a struggling student, and as soon as that situation changes for you, you're determined, you'll be the one hosting.
There are many languages spoken in your quarters, in your local news agent, the grocery shop, the barber, just next door, and it's a batch of honour for everyone to snap up as many phrases from as many tongues as possible. Religion is kept private, unless it's to debate the existence of God, and you, the atheist, meet once a month with the faithful in the nearest church, mosque or synagogue, the debate is fierce, no holes barred, and afterwards, hopefully, drinks are on the house.

Think of the good that is, that has been achieved, that still needs to be improved upon, that could be. You're lucky, you live in a country that recognizes healthcare as a right, not a consumer good, because it recognizes health and staying alive as a right, and it recognizes it for everyone in need of it. No exception. No imposition either, healthcare is healthcare, no matter what gender the body.
The police is being trained to understand that the first requirement for successfully policing any district is trust. Trust for which the citizens pay them. Nobody is being stopped without a good reason that will be articulated. Nobody is being stopped because of the way they look. If an arrest is made, then only on probable cause. Everybody not only has the right to legal representation, but gets it, and the length of a trial and the verdict do not depend on how much money the defendant has. Plea-deals entered by people proclaiming their innocence are unheard of, such an idea will seem grotesque, obscene to everyone. The prisons hold only those who're are plausibly deemed guilty, and who's guilt requires their incarceration. As a consequence they're half empty. Because you're lucky, you live in a country that recognizes that only proof of guilt can lead to taking someone's freedom, and that a prison must not be the means for any person or institution to make money. It recognizes that such an idea is disgusting.
Your country has recognized a home as a right, too. In your country the evicting landlord is the offender.

You're lucky. You live in a country in which the fire brigade is being called in the eventuality of a fire, not the nearest hairdresser with their little water atomizers. In which the plumber fixes your pipe, not the bookkeeper. In which medical doctors, health experts, virologists, immunologists and other people dedicating their lives to understanding pathogens will advise you on vaccines, not the beefed up, high blood pressure peddler of Dr. Tumblety's wonder tincture for everything.[226]
A country in which science is valued, valued as what it is, a method, the by far most successful method in determining truth where it can, and getting as close to it as possible where it cannot yet. Where people are told at young age that the truth is not theirs, only theirs to discover, by and by, to eventually, hopefully, understand it. Where the strategy of how to assess, to distinguish between good and bad information, is already taught to your 5 year old kids because they're fully capable of understanding it. Where the investigation into truth is divorced from catchy sound-bites, and it's divorced from ideology, where this investigation is recognized as something that leads to a clarification of priorities and thus to the formation of a genuine set of values, something that will require work, one's own work, and where thus ideologies are shunned, because the former has your thinking adapt to the reality of this world, and the latter forcibly attempts it the other way round.

226 Francis Tumblety was a later half 19th century quack who'd later be suggested as a (very, very unlikely) Jack the Ripper suspect:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francis_Tumblety

A country where education is recognized as a right, and where education always means good education, independent from how much money a family has. Where the profession of teacher is an honourable one, and where this honour requires passion for the subjects in every teacher. Where teachers begin the curriculum by offering excitement for the respective subject, not mere pressure and routine.
It's a country where this education has brought forth generations that will never allow the banning of a single book, or the banishing of a single person on nothing but the basis of disagreement. Generations made up of individuals who understand that of the thousands upon thousands of opinions they hold not all of them can *possibly* be accurate and correct.

It is a country in which chauvinism is on rapid decline, ever since its people have collectively identified solipsism as the base chauvinism. Since they have come to truly understand that they're living on a planet with a limited window for life, a window that spans about half the time the planet itself has, quite possibly even less, and that this planet indeed orbits a star, along with many other bodies, and that this system orbits the far away centre of a galaxy, one of a sheer mind-melting number of galaxies.
Citizens who have understood and truly integrated that there are not them alone, and animals and plants and others apart from them, that there's nothing telling them that they should make all other species their subjects, and that nothing good can come from such an idea, but that there are only animals, plants and others, that it is not them and animals, that it is them and *other* animals. And that it might well be that they're not the only sentient species. And that they cannot live without those others. And that they should not want to, should not be ready to accept that.

You recognize the other species as your cousins, and you won't be able to help seeing all those that are of yours as your sisters and brothers, no matter how far away their home is.
You aren't required to love them. You'll be quarrelling. But they are your sisters and brothers.
To achieve this attitude you must first accept who your cousins are.

Hence your country is a country where the preservation of everything that affords you life, affords you staying alive along with your sisters, brothers and cousins, is absolute priority. Different from your ancestors you've taken the first warning of what happens when you add to potent greenhouse gases, published in 1856, to heart, better late than never. And you have looked at it, and you have looked at the solution, presented merely two decades later. And you have cursed the coal lobbyists who'd given the same argument you've still heard in your lifetime from the oil lobbyists, and you turned to set it right.
You might be too late. You know that the sacrifices to be made are already greater now, because the longer you wait… Another principle easily conveyed to a 5-yr old. And you know the threat is global. You'll need to convince the rest of this globe on which your country is but a stripe. But you start by being an example.

You're lucky. You live in a country that has accomplished all this, and much more, because it has recognized the question of who is to lead it in all this as a priority, too. It has established a system in which only those who want to serve will lead, and those who want to rule are deemed as the least qualified and equipped, and rooted out earliest in the process. A system that keeps the money for funding, not using it for campaigning or for buying victories. A system that reliably eliminates those that aren't fit for roles of authority. A system that is kept safe by a division of power that is more than just traditional, more than just an idea.

Wake up, dreamer. Time to wake up.
Your country, America, is no such country. Neither are most others. Perhaps none, not on this planet.

If it feels to you as if every single act on behalf of the Trump administration since inauguration, and before, every executive order, every cabinet appointment, every commissioned new department and every directive are in *diametric opposition* to all the good that could be done by a competent, compassionate government, all the ways in which the American people could feel good, could *behave* well, all the good that would come from a conscious and respectful coexistence with the environment and the other life that inhabits it, all the good that a country as rich and as powerful as the U.S. could do in the world, that's because you're right. Literally everything Trump & Co. do is bad, has the distinct smell of bad to it. That smell of the lifeless, the drab, and the destructive, that, along with the many faces of fear, come with every dictatorship.

And that is also what you see, hear and feel when asking yourself, 'what is wrong with this guy?' You ought to trust yourself here. I asked who would even want this much power, who'd want absolute, unrestricted power, who'd want it by the only means providing for it, the oppression of one's own people, and by extension I thus ask, who'd want to oppress? We're talking pathology here.
And it's contagious, because it's temptation. Your everyday is filled with characters who in their own personal ways are corrupted, who are selfish, mean, vindictive, hateful, spiteful and to various degrees sadistic. Plain, boring, uninspired, untalented everyday people, people most of us would avoid. Marjorie Taylor Greene and Stephen Miller are evidence for such people being able to make it into politics, to become legislatures, at least in title, and executives. They enable because they have been enabled first. The President will always have all his worst men and women, because that's the type he needs, to whom he's drawn, just as they're drawn to him.
Which, translated, means something everyone seems to have a really hard time wrapping their heads around. That the perceived madhouse is real. It's not a euphemism. It's just that the mad people in it are *legally sane*.

I grew up during the cold war. Reagan deploying Pershing II missiles in Germany.[227] I don't know to what degree the consistent threat of thermonuclear annihilation was present in the minds of my peers, it must have varied, we're very good at compartmentalising, but I for one was very conscious of the danger. All those many years. The fear never subsided completely, not after the end of the Soviet Union either. It's a very particular fear, unique, it's an incomparable fear.
You fear something, you're going to imagine it. To try and imagine it. Imagining what could lead to it. It wasn't unrealistic, the most plausible scenario in my mind that could lead to those missiles getting fired wasn't specific to any cause for a build-up to a confrontation, but had to do with misreading, misinterpreting and mistake, and I'd learn by and by just how realistic that was. But there was also always that other scenario, what if a faction mad and fatalistic enough got their hands on these weapons, what if such a faction made it into a government of a country armed with them? What if a madman became a leader of such a country?

Of the madmen currently in their respective countries' highest office Trump seems the maddest because his demeanour reminds more of Mussolini or Amin, but the implications arising from the question 'who would want to' points to them all. We already live in this situation.

The scenario of a thermonuclear world's ending is the extreme. Before that there are many ways in which to damage the world beyond repair, and still more to damage it and make repair a long-term goal. People *will* die from some of the Trump administration's actions, e.g. the withdrawal from the aid program. Locally from the disastrous decision to appoint Robert Kennedy jr. to take care of, pun intended, American health. Further down the line, as a result from withdrawing from the already feeble measures to counter the heating of our climate. What exact consequences the turmoil in the world's economy will result in we'll find out. It, too, will probably cost lives.

227 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pershing_II#Deployment

The pathology of dictatorship is inherently destructive. Inherently, it cannot help itself. It's the boy in the man in action, even if it wears a suit and tie, even if it feels to the man itself as if he's the strong adult. We've learned to see respectability in the attire of the powerful, in the conservative dress codes, forgetting that mob bosses like to dress themselves this way for the relevant occasions. It's a costume. Just like the cowboy hat. I have my criticism for Senator Fetterman, but at least he understands that one. Trump, Miller and Hegseth will always look the thugs they are, no matter what they're wearing. They'll look the thugs and the clowns they are.

In pathology we'll always see ritual. We'll also see it in the theatre of fascism. Long before the military parades, the new edition of uniforms that'll suddenly appear on them. We'll see it in the trinkets. The pins and the coins. The collectables. The changes in routine, who addresses whom how. The face will remain evil, just as it had been right from the start. Fascism doesn't hide. It's a truly remarkable feature of it, it may sneak measures in, it will prepare, clumsily or not, it'll *prime* the citizens, but for any half-way alert person it's not so much that you'll need to pay attention as your attention being grabbed from the corners of your eyes. It doesn't hide what it wants to do.

Which is why it was always apt to call Trump's tendencies that, fascistic. One of the for me most infuriating things to hear during his first term was 'how this isn't what we are as Americans'. A big thing was made of the fact that he missed getting the popular vote by less people than those living in Chicago. Meaning even back then roughly half of voting Americans wanted him. Wanted *that.* Of those commentators I heard Rachel Maddow might have been among the first to admit, actually, no, it seems that we are. We cannot discount one half of the population. Stunningly, though not surprisingly, (even) after trying him out, the second time even more wanted Trump. Wanted that. And this time people say that this isn't what 'we are as Americans' only in view of the apparent hindsight of some of their fellow Americans, as it dawns on them what they have have done electing this man again.

If it soothes you, America, it's not an all-American feature. We know it well here in Europe, because it's an oldie, and we see it here again, too.
If it soothes you. Though it really shouldn't.

May 6th, 2025
proofed draft May 12th, 2025
finalized May 24th, 2025

CC BY NC ND

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License

https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/